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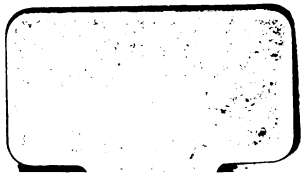

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THE

MARCHIONESS OF BRINVILLIERS.

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
BELL & BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH;
CUMMING AND FERGUSON, DUBLIN.
1846.

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THE MARCHIONESS OF BRINVILLIERS.

St Croix upbraiding the Marchioness

London Published by Richard Bentley 1846

THE

MARCHIONESS OF BRINVILLIERS,

THE

POISONER OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

A

Romance of Old Paris.

BY

ALBERT SMITH.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
BELL & BRADFUTE, EDINBURGH.
CUMMING AND FERGUSON, DUBLIN.
1846.

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TO

ALFRED, COUNT D'ORSAY,

THIS ROMANCE IS DEDICATED,

WITH

EVERY FEELING OF ADMIRATION OF HIS TALENTS,

AND

APPRECIATION OF HIS FRIENDSHIP,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

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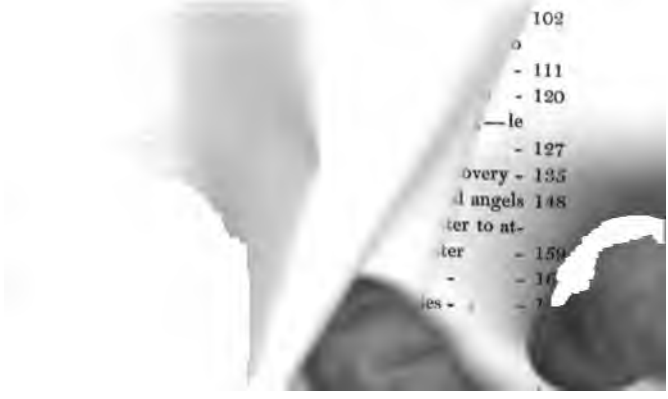

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THE

MARCHIONESS OF BRINVILLIERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE MOUNTEBANK OF THE CARREFOUR DU CHATELET.

One hundred and eighty years ago, on a sunny spring evening in the year of grace 1665, the space of ground which extended from the front of the Grand Châtelet in Paris to the rude wooden barrier which then formed the only safeguard between the public road and the river, at the northern foot of the Pont au Change, was crowded with a joyous and attentive mass of people, who had collected from their evening promenade to this spot, and now surrounded the temporary platform of an itinerant charlatan, erected in front of the ancient fortress.

Let us rest awhile on the steps of the Pont au Change, to become acquainted with the localities; for little of its ancient appearance now remains. The present resident at Paris, however well versed he might be in the topography of that city, might search in vain for even the vestiges of any part of the principal building, which rose, at the date above spoken of, on the banks of the river Seine. The Pont au Change still exists, but not as it then appeared. The visitor may call to mind this picturesque structure, with its seven arches crossing to the Marché aux Fleurs, from the corner of the Quai de la Megisserie. In 1660 it was covered with houses, in common with most of the

other bridges that spanned the Seine, with the exception of the Pont Neuf. These were now partly in ruins, from the ravages of time and frequent conflagrations. Lower down the river might be seen the vestiges of the Pont Marchand—a wooden bridge, which had been burnt down nearly forty years before, some of whose charred and blackened timbers still obstructed the free course of the river. It had stood on the site of the Pont aux Meuniers —also a wooden bridge—to which six or seven boat-mills were attached; and these, in consequence of the flooding of the Seine, dragged the whole structure away in the winter of 1596.

The Grand Châtelet stood at the foot of the Pont au Change; its ground is now occupied by a square, and an elegant fountain. The origin of the Châtelet has been lost in antiquity. It had once been a strong fortress; and its massive round-towers still betokened its strength. Next it was a prison, where the still increasing city rendered its position of little value in guarding the gates; and afterwards it became the Court of Jurisdiction pertaining to the Provost of Paris. Part of its structure was now in ruins; wild foliage grew along the summits of its outer walls, and small buildings had been run up between the buttresses, occupied by retailers of wine and small merchandise. A dark and noisome passage, which ran through it, was the only thoroughfare from the Pont au Change to the Rue St. Denis, and this was constantly crowded with foot-passengers.

The Carrefour du Châtelet was at this period, with the Pont Neuf, the principal resort of the people of Paris; then, as now, ever addicted to the promenade and out-of-door lounging. A singularly varied panorama did the open place present to any one standing at the cross which was reared in the centre, and gazing around him. He might have seen a duel taking place between two young gallants on the foot-path, in open contest. Swords were then as quickly drawn forth as tempers; no appointments were made for the seclusion of the faubourgs beyond the walls which occupied the site of the present boulevards; and these quarrels often ended fatally, though merely fought

for the possession of some courtezan, who, in common with others, blazed forth in her sumptuous trappings on the bridges during the afternoon. But the guards never interfered, and the passengers looked on unconcernedly until the struggle was, one way or the other, decided.

The beggars were as numerous then as now—perhaps more so; for the various *Cours des Miracles*, the "Rookeries" of Paris, if we may be allowed the expression, which abounded all over the city, offered them a ready colony and retreat. Here, were counterfeiters of every disease to which humanity is liable, dragging themselves along the rude footpath; there, beggars of more active habits, who swarmed, cap in hand, by the side of the splendid carriages which passed along the quays, to and from the Louvre. The thieves, too, everywhere plied their vocation; and the absurd custom of carrying the purse suspended at the girdle, favoured their delinquencies; whence certain of them acquired the title of *coupe-bourse*, as in England the pickpockets were formerly termed cut-purses.

Crowds of soldiers, venders of street merchandise, and charlatans of every description filled the Carrefour. Looking to the tableau offered by the public resorts of Paris at the present time, the Champs Elysées for instance, (in 1665 consisting only of fields, literally, in cultivation) it is curious to observe how little the principal features of the assembly have altered from the accounts left us by accurate and careful delineators of former manners.

But, besides all these, the mere idlers, of both sexes, were numerous and remarkable; an ever-changing throng of gay habits, glittering accoutrements, and attractive figures and faces. The licence of the age, unbounded in its extent, permitted appointments of every kind to be made without notice. Every kind of dissipation was openly practised, and therefore the world winked at it, as under such circumstances it always does, even if the place of an illicit assignation or conference (and in the reign of Louis the Fourteenth they were seldom otherwise) were a church, as indeed was most frequently the case. The generally licentious taste extended to the dress and conversation; hence, from the crowds of gallants who thronged

the Carrefour, salutations and remarks of strange freedom were constantly addressed to the handsome women who, in the prodigality of their display of dazzling busts and shoulders, invited the satire or compliment; nay, to such a pitch was that *negligé* attire carried, that some might be seen walking abroad in loose damask robes, merely confined at the waist by a cord of twisted silk.

The afternoon sunlight fell upon the many turrets and spires, and quivered on the vanes and casements of the fine old buildings that then surrounded the Carrefour. Across the river the minarets of the Palais de Justice rose in sharp outline against the blue sky, glowing in the ruddy tint, together with the campanile at the corner of the quay, and the blackened towers of Notre Dame, further in the Ile de la Cité, round which flocks of birds were wheeling in the clear spring air, who had their dwellings amidst the corbels, spouts, and belfries of the cathedral. There was not an old grey gable or corroded spire which, steeped in the rays of the setting sun, did not blush into light and warmth. And the mild season had drawn all the inhabitants of the houses who were not abroad to their windows, whence they gazed upon the gay crowd below, through pleasant trellises of climbing vegetation, which crept along the pieces of twine latticing the casements. Humble things, indeed, the plants were,—hops, common beans, wild convolvuli, and the like, spreading from a rude *cruche* of mould upon the sill; but the beams of the sun came through them cheerfully; and their shadows danced and trembled on the rude tiled floor as sportively as on the costly inlaid *parquets* of the richer quarters of the city.

The platform round which the laughing crowd had assembled was formed on a light cart, that had its wheels covered with some coarse drapery. There were two occupants of this stage. One of them was a man who might have numbered some forty years; but his thin furrowed cheeks and sunken eye would have added another score to his age, in the opinion of a casual observer. He was dressed entirely in faded black serge, made after the fashion of the time, with full arms, and trunks fastened just above the knee. Some bands of vandyked lace were fastened

round his wrists; and he wore a collar of the same material, whilst his doublet was looped together but a little way down his waist. A skull-cap of black velvet completed his attire.

Yet few who looked at him took much notice of his dress: the features of this man absorbed all attention. His face exactly resembled that of a condor, his cap adding to the likeness by being worn somewhat forward; from beneath which his long black hair fell perfectly straight down the back of his neck. His brows were scowling: his eyes deep-set and jet-black: but they were bloodshot, and surrounded by the crimson ridges of the lids. His cheeks were pallid as those of a corpse; and his general figure, naturally tall, was increased in appearance of height by his attenuated limbs. He took little notice of the crowd, but remained sitting at a small table on the carriage, upon which there was a small show of chemical glasses and preparations: leaving nearly all the business of his commerce to his assistant.

This was a merry fellow, plump, and well favoured, in the prime of life. He was habited in a parti-fashioned costume of black and white, his opposite arms and legs being of different colours; and his doublet quartered in the same style. Round his waist he carried a pointed girdle, to which small hawk-bells were attached; and he wore the red hood of the *moyen age* period, fitting closely to his neck and head, and hanging down at the top, to which a larger bell was fastened. His face had such a comic expression, that he only had to wink at the crowd to command their laughter. And when to this he added his jests, he threw them into paroxysms of merriment.

"*Ohé! Ohé!*" my masters!" he cried, "the first physician of the universe, and many other places, has come again to confer his blessings on you. He has philtres for those who have not had enough of love, and potions for those who have had too much. He can attach to you a new mistress when she gets coy, or get rid of an old one when she gets troublesome. And if you have two at once, here is an elixir that will kill their jealousies."

"Send some to Louis!" cried one of the bystanders.

A roar of laughter followed the speech, and the crowd looked round to see the speaker. But, although bold enough to utter the recommendation, he had not the courage to support it. However, the cue had been given to the crowd; and the applause and laugh of approbation continued.

"Give it to La Vallière!" exclaimed another of the citizens.

"Or Madame de Montespan," cried a third.

"Or, rather to her husband!" was ejaculated in a woman's voice.

"Respect his parents," exclaimed a bourgeois, with mock solemnity, who was standing at the foot of the bridge, and pointing to a group of three figures in bronze relief, which adorned a triangular group of houses close to where he was stationed. They were those of Louis XIII., Anne of Austria, and the present King when a child.

"Simon Guillain, the sculptor, was a false workman!" shouted the bystander who had first spoken. "Where is the fourth of the family? Where is the Iron Mask?"

The mountebank, who had been endeavouring to talk through the noise, found himself completely outclamoured by the uproar that now arose. He gave up making himself heard, and remained silent whilst the crowd launched their sallies, or bandied their satirical jibes from one to the other.

"Where is the fourth?" continued the speaker.

"Ask Dame Perronette, who nursed him!" was the reply from the other side of the carrefour.

"Ask Saint-Mars, who locked on his iron mask."

"Who will knock and ask at Mazarin's coffin!" shouted another, with a strength of lungs that insured a hearing. "He ought to know best."

The name of Anne of Austria was on the lips of many; but, with all the licence of the time, they dared not give utterance to it. And, besides, as the last speaker finished, a yell broke forth that drowned every other sound; and showed by its force, which partook almost of ferocity, in

what manner the memory of the Cardinal was yet held. The instant comparative silence was obtained, a fellow sang from a popular satire upon the late prime minister,

" He trick'd the vengeance of the Fronde,—
All in the world, and those beyond.
A bas! à bas le Cardinal!
He trick'd the headsman by his death—
The devil, by his latest breath!
Who for his perjured soul did call,
But found that he had none at all,
A bas! à bas le Cardinal!

The throng chorused the last words with great emphasis, and then in a few minutes were once more tranquil. The charged cloud had got rid of its thunder, and the storm abated.

The physician, who was upon the platform, took little notice of the clamour. At its commencement, he glared round upon the assembly for a few seconds, and then once more bent his eyes upon the table before him. His assistant continued, as soon as he could make himself audible,

" *Ohé!* masters! a philtre for your eyes that will make them work upon others at a distance. Here is one that will infect the spirit of the other with sickness at heart; here is a second that will instil love also by the glance of the eye that is washed with it."

They were little phials containing a small quantity of coloured fluid. The price was small, and they were eagerly bought up by the multitude. But for every one of the second, they purchased a dozen of the first.

" Art thou sure of its operation?" asked a looker-on.

" Glances of love and malice shoot subtly," replied the fool; " and my master can draw subtle spirits from simple things that shall work upon each other at some distance. But your own spirits, with the aid of this philtre, are more subtle than they."

" A proof! a proof!" cried a young man at the extremity of the carrefour.

" The philtre is not for such as you," cried the mountebank. " You have youth, and a well-favoured aspect; you have a strong arm, a gay coat, and a trusty rapier. What would man require more?"

The crowd turned to look at the object of the clown's speech. At the end of the carrefour, two young men were gazing, arm-in-arm, upon the assemblage. Both were of the same age; their existence might have reached to seven or eight-and-twenty years, and they were attired in the gay military costume of the period; with rich satin under-sleeves, and bright knots or epaulettes upon the right shoulder.

One of them, to whom the mountebank had more particularly addressed himself, was of a fair complexion, and wore his own light hair in long flowing curls upon his shoulders. His face was well formed, and singularly intelligent and expressive; his forehead high and expansive; and his eyes deep set beneath the arch of the orbit, ever bearing the appearance of fixed regard upon whatever object they were cast. To the close observer there was a faint line running from the edge of the nostril to the outer angle of the lip, which, coupled with his retreating eye, gave him an expression of satire and mistrust. But so varied was the general expression of his face, that it was next to impossible to divine his thoughts for two minutes together.

The other was dark — his face had less indication of intellect than his companion's, although in general contour equally good-looking. Yet did the features bear a somewhat jaded expression, and the colour on his cheek was rather fevered than healthy. His eyes, too, were sunk, but more from active causes than natural formation; and he gazed on the objects that surrounded him with the listless air of an idler. His mind was evidently but little occupied with anything he then saw. His attire was somewhat richer than his friend's, betokening a superior rank in the army.

"A proof! a proof!" cried the gayer of the two, repeating his words.

"Where will you have it, then?" asked the mountebank, looking about the square. "Ha! there is as fair a maiden as ever a king's officer might follow, sitting at the cross. Shall she be in love with you?"

Again the attention of the crowd was directed by the

glance of the mountebank towards a rude iron cross that was set up in the carrefour.

At its foot was a young girl, half sitting, half reclining upon the stone-work which formed its base. She was attired in the costume of the working order of Paris. Her hair, different from that of the higher class of females, who wore it in light bunches of ringlets at the side of the head, was in plain bands, over which a white handkerchief, edged with lace, was carelessly thrown, falling in lappets on each side. Her eyes and hair were alike dark as night, but her beautiful face was deadly pale, until she found the gaze of the mob had been called towards her. And then the red blood rushed to her neck and cheeks, as she hastily rose from her seat, and was about to leave the square.

"A pretty wench enough," cried the cavalier with the black hair, as he raised himself upon the step of a house to see her. She was still hidden from his companion.

"I doubt not," answered the other, carelessly; "but I do not care to look. No," he cried loudly to the mountebank, "I have no love to spare her in return, and that might break her heart."

The girl started at his voice, and looked towards the spot from whence it proceeded. But she was unable to see him for the intervening people.

"A beryl!" cried the fool, showing a small crystal of a reddish tint to the crowd. "A beryl to tell your fortune, then. Who will read the vision in it? a young maiden, pure and without guile, can alone do it; are there none in our good city of Paris?"

None stepped forward. The fair-haired cavalier laughed aloud as he cried out:

"You seem to have told what is past better than you can predict what is to come. Ho! sirs, what say you to this slur upon the fair fame of your daughters and sisters —will none of them venture?"

A murmur was arising from the crowd, when the physician, who had been glancing angrily at the two young officers, suddenly rose up, and shouted with a foreign accent,

"If you will have your destinies unfolded, there needs

no beryl to picture them. Let me look at your hands, and I will tell you all."

"A match!" cried the young soldier. "Now good people, let us pass, and see what this solemn-visaged doctor knows about us."

The two officers advanced towards the platform. As they approached it, the crowd fell back, and then immediately closed after them with eager curiosity. The friends stood now directly beside the waggon.

"Your hands," said the physician.

They were immediately extended to him.

"You are in the king's service," continued he.

"Our dresses would tell you that," said the darker of the two.

"But they would not tell me that you are married," answered the physician. "You have two children — a fair wife — and no friend."

"'Tis a lie!" exclaimed the cavalier with the light hair.

"It is true," replied the necromancer coldly, directing the gaze of his piercing eye full upon him.

"But our destiny, our destiny," said the dark officer with impatience.

"You would care but little to know," returned the other, "if all should turn out as I here read it. I have said your wife is fair — a score and a half of years have robbed her but little of her beauty; and I have said you have *no friend.* Now read your own fate."

"Come away," said the fair cavalier, trying to drag his friend by the arm from the platform. "We will hear no more — he is an impostor."

As the soldier spoke, a hectic patch of colour rose on the pale cheek of the physician, and his eye lighted up with a wild brightness. He raised his arm in an attitude of denunciation, and cried with a loud but hollow voice:

"You are wrong, young man; and you shall smart for thus bearding one to whom occult nature is as his alphabet. We have met before — and we shall meet again."

"Pshaw! I know you not," replied the other heedlessly.

"But I know *you*," continued the physician. "Do you remember an inn at Milan — do you recollect a small room that opened upon the grape-covered balcony of the Croce Bianca? Can you call that to mind, Gaudin de Sainte-Croix?"

As the officer heard his name pronounced, he turned round; and stared with mingled surprise and alarm at the physician. The latter beckoned him to return to the platform, and he eagerly obeyed. The crowd collected round them closer than ever, hustling one another in their anxiety to push nearer to the platform, for affairs appeared to be assuming a turn rather more than ordinary. And so intent were they upon the principal personages of the scene, that they paid no attention to the girl who had been sitting at the cross, and who, upon hearing the name, started from her resting-place, and rushed to the outside of the throng that now closely surrounded the waggon. But the crowd was too dense for her to penetrate; and she passed along from one portion to the other, vainly endeavouring to force her way through it. Some persons roughly thrust her back; others bade her desist from pressing against them; and not a few launched some questionable hints upon the object of her anxiety to get closer to the two officers.

Meanwhile, Sainte-Croix, as we may now call him, had again reached the edge of the platform. The physician bent down and whispered a word or two in his ear, which, with all his efforts to retain his self-possession before the mob, evidently startled him. He looked with a scrutinising attention at the face of the other, as if his whole perception were concentrated in that one gaze, and then with an almost imperceptible nod of recognition, caught his companion by the arm, and dragged him forcibly through the crowd.

As the two cavaliers departed, the interest of the by-standers ceased, and they fell back from the platform. The girl now glided quickly between them, towards where the officers had been standing. But they were gone; and, after a vain search amidst the crowd on the carrefour, she

retired back to where she had been sitting, and covering her face with her hands, was once more unheeded and alone.

CHAPTER II.

THE BOAT-MILL ON THE RIVER.

At last the sun went down, and twilight fell upon the towers and pointed roofs of the old châtelet. The loiterers gradually disappeared from the place and bridge. The rough *voitures de place*, which clattered incessantly over a pavement so rude and uneven that it became a wonder how they were enabled to progress at all, one by one withdrew from the thoroughfares, carrying a great portion of the general noise with them, not more proceeding from the hoarse voices of the drivers than from the ceaseless cracking of their long whips, which was thus always going on. The cries of those who sold things in the streets were also hushed, as well as the tolling and clanging of the innumerable bells in the steeples of the churches, which until dusk never knew rest, but tried to outroar each other as noisily as the supporters of the different sects, whose hour of meeting they announced. One or two lanterns were already glimmering from the windows of private houses; for by this means only were the streets of Paris preserved from utter darkness throughout the night: and the full moon began to rise slowly behind the turrets of Notre Dame.

There was little security, then, in the most public places, and few cared to be about after dusk, except in the immediate company of the horse or foot patrol, save those who only stalked abroad with the night; so that it was not long before the carrefour was nearly deserted. Two persons alone remained there. One was the assistant to the physician, who had left him in charge of the platform; and he was now occupied in harnessing two rough mules

to the waggon, in which the platform and apparatus had been stowed away. The other was the girl whom we have before spoken of, and who had remained at the cross in almost the same attitude — one of deep sorrow and despondency.

The fool had nearly finished his labours, and was preparing to leave the square, when the young female quitted her resting-place, and advanced towards him with a timid and faltering step. Believing her to be some wretched wanderer of the carrefour, proceeding to her home before the curfew sounded, he took but little notice of her; and was about to seize the mules by the bridle and lead them onwards, when she placed her hand upon his arm, and implored him to stop.

"Now, good mistress, your business," said the assistant; "for I have little time to spare. A sharp appetite hurries labour more than a sharp overseer; and my stomach keeps time better than the bell of Notre Dame."

"I wished to purchase something," returned the girl.

"Ah! you are too late; we have nought left but holy pebbles to keep steeds from the night-mare, and philtres for the court dames to retain their butterfly lovers. Good night, *ma belle*. Hir-r-r-r! Jacquot! hir-r-r-r."

The last expression was addressed to his mules, as they rattled the old bells upon their head-pieces, and moved forwards. Again the girl seized the upraised hand of the mountebank, as he was about to use the whip, and begged him to desist.

"I am sure you have what I want," she said hurriedly. "I will pay you for it — all that I have left from my wages is yours. Is not your master the doctor St. Antonio?"

"Well — and suppose he is?"

"They talk strangely of his art about Paris, as being able to play with life and death as he chooses. They say that he can enchant medicines; and with a little quicksilver so prepared destroy a whole family — nay, an army."

"Were you to believe an hundredth part of the lies they tell daily about Paris, your credulity would find time for nothing else," returned the other. "What should one

so young and fair as you want with poison, beyond keeping the rats from your *mansarde?* — for to that end alone does my master prepare it, and even then in small quantities."

"I wanted it for myself," replied the girl. "I have nothing left in this world to care about. I wish to die."

Her head drooped, and her voice faltered as she spoke these words, so that they were almost inaudible; more so than the deep and weary sigh that followed them.

"Die — sweetheart!" cried the mountebank cheeringly, as he turned towards her, and raised her chin with his hand. "Die! — St. Benoit, who rules my *fête* day, prevent it! You must not die this half-century. Besides, although the doctors can't yet find out poisons in the stomachs of their dead patients, like witches' nails and pins, yet the stones can whisper, in Paris, all they hear. And what should we get—I and my master—for thus serving you?"

"All that I possess in the world," answered the girl.

"Ay — that would come first, without doubt; and, next, a short shrift, a long cord, and a dry faggot, on the Place de Grêve. No, no, sweetheart: if you brought as much gold as my mules could drag home, we could not do it."

"Then you will not let me have it?"

"Why, you silly pigeon, I have told you so. With that pretty face and those dark eyes, be sure you have much yet in store to live for. Or if you must die, don't make any one your murderer. The Seine is wide and deep enough for all; and, besides, will cost you nothing."

He spoke these words less in a spirit of levity than the wish to cheer the poor applicant by his good-humoured tones. But the girl clasped her hands together, and looked round with a shudder towards the quays.

"The river!" she exclaimed. "I have gazed upon it often, but my heart failed me. I shrunk from the cold, black water as it tore and struggled through those dark arches: I could not bear to think that its foul polluted current would be my only winding-sheet. I would sooner die in my little room; and then in the morning the sun

would fall upon me as it does now, but it would not awaken me to another day of weeping, — the same sun that shines in Languedoc, only there it is brighter."

"Are you from Languedoc, then?" inquired the man.

"I was born near Béziers," she replied sadly.

"Mass! why that is my own country. What is your name?"

"Louise Gauthier."

"I don't remember to have heard it. I ought to have known, though, that you were from the south by your accent. And what brought you to Paris?"

"There has been much misery and persecution amongst us," answered the girl; "for we are Protestant; almost all our homes have been broken up, for that reason, and so," — and she hesitated — "and so I came up to seek work."

"Was there no other reason?" asked the man. "I think there must have been."

"I went to the Gobelins," continued Louise, avoiding the question, "and got employment. I heard that others had gained money there."

"And rank, too," said the fool. "My master had a customer this afternoon — an officer in the King's army, who is better known as the Marquis of Brinvilliers than by his proper name of Antoine Gobelin. The water of the Bièvre has rather enriched his blood; he has besides a fair income, and a fairer wife. And are you there still?"

"I am not. I was discharged from the *atelier* this morning for resisting the importunities of the superintendent Lachaussée, and I am now alone — alone!"

She hid her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

"And why not return to Languedoc, my poor girl?" said the mountebank, in a kind voice, which associated but oddly with his quaint dress. "They would scarcely care to persecute such a gentle thing as yourself — Protestant though you be."

"No, no, I cannot leave Paris. There is another object that keeps me here; or rather it did — for all hope is gone. There is now nothing left for me but death. I could have remained unheeded in the country; but in this great

city the solitude is fearful. Those who are alone, alone can tell how terrible it is."

Although the duty of the charlatan was to impose upon the public in every fashion that they were likely to bite at most readily, yet there was a kind heart under his motley attire. He threw his whip over the backs of the two mules, and taking the weeping girl kindly by the hands, said to her:

"Come, come, countrywoman: I shall not leave you to your loneliness this night at least. If aught were to happen to you, I should feel that I myself had brought your body to the Grêve. My wife and myself live in a strange abode, but there is room for you; and you shall go with me."

The girl looked at him with an expression of mistrust which his calling might well have occasioned; and murmured out a few faint words of refusal.

"Bah!" exclaimed the other. "You are from Languedoc, like myself, and therefore we are neighbours. I would wager that we have sat under the same trees, within a short half-league of Béziers."

And he commenced humming the *refrain* of a ballad in the old Provençal dialect. It was evidently well known to Louise. She shook her head, and pressed her hand before her eyes, as if to shut out some sad image that her ideas had conjured up.

"You have heard that before?" asked the man.

"Very often—I know it well."

"You heard it from a man, then, I will be sworn; and perhaps a faithless one. He wrote well, long, long ago, who said, that those who were gifted with music and singing, loved our Languedocian romances, and travelled about the earth that they might betray women. My *marotte* to an old sword-belt that the tune sang itself in your ears all the way to Paris. Was it not so?"

The girl returned no answer, but remained silent, with her eyes fixed upon the ground.

"Well, well; we will not press for a reply. But you shall come with me this night, *ma bonne*, for I will not leave you so. Only let me take you to where our mules'

lodging is situated, and then I will bring you back to my own."

He scarcely waited for her acquiescence, but lifting her gently in his arms, placed her on the waggon. And then he gave his signal to the mules, and they moved along the carrefour, over which the darkness was now stealing.

They passed along the quays and the Port au Foin, now dimly lighted by the few uncertain and straggling lanterns before alluded to, until the mules turned of their own accord into a court of the Rue St. Antoine. A peasant in wooden shoes clumped forward to receive them, with whom the charlatan exchanged a few words previously to conducting his companion back again, nearly along the same route by which they had arrived at the stables.

"You may call me Benoit," he said, as he perceived that the girl was sometimes at a loss how to address him; "Benoit Mousel. Do not stand upon adding 'maître' to it. We are compatriots, as I have told you, and therefore friends. The quays are dark at night, but the river is darker still. You made a good choice of two evils in keeping out of it."

They walked on, barely lighted through the obscurity, until they came to the foot of the Pont Notre Dame, the most ancient of those still existing at Paris. It is now, as formerly, on the line of thoroughfare running from the Rue St. Jacques, in the Quartier Latin, to the Rue St. Martin. The modern visitor may perhaps recall it to mind by a square tower built against its western side, flanked by two small houses raised upon piles, beneath which are some wheels, by whose working some thirty of the fountains in the streets of Paris are supplied with water. This mechanism was not constructed until a few years after the date of our story. Before that, the Pont Notre Dame, in common with the other bridges we have mentioned, was covered with houses, which remained in excellent condition, to the number of sixty-eight or seventy, up to the commencement of the last century. They were then destroyed; and now the parapets are covered with boxes of old books, ranged in graduated prices, whilst

shoe-blacks, lucifer-merchants, and beautifiers of lap-dogs occupy the kerb of the pavement.

Benoit descended some rude steps leading from the quay to the river, guiding Louise carefully by the hand; and dragging a boat towards them, which was lying there in readiness, embarked with his trembling companion, as if to cross the river. But he stopped half-way, close to the pier of the bridge, and then the girl saw that they had touched a long low range of what appeared to be houses, which looked as if they floated on the water. And, in effect, they did so; their continuous vibration, and the rushing of the river between certain divisions in their substructure, showing that they were boat-mills.

"Where are you taking me?" asked Louise, timidly.

"To our house," replied Benoit. "You have nothing to fear. I told you it was an odd dwelling. Now mind how you place your foot on the timber. So: gallantly done."

He assisted her from the boat, which was rocking on the dark stream of the river, as it rushed through the arches, on to a few frail steps of wood which hung down from one of the buildings to the water. Then making it fast to one of the piles, he passed with her along a small gallery of boards, and pushing a door open, entered the floating house.

They were in a small apartment, forming one of a long range, which had apparently been built in an enormous lighter: and in one of these the large shaft of a mill-wheel could be seen turning heavily round, as it shook the building, whilst the whole mass oscillated with the peculiar vibration of a floating structure. At a small table in the middle of this chamber, a buxom-looking female, in a half-rustic, half-city attire, was busily at work with her needle, at a rude table. There was little other furniture in this ark. A small stove, some seats, and a few hanging shelves, on which were placed some bottles of coloured fluids, retorts, and little earthenware dishes, used in chemical analysis, completed the list of all that was movable in the room. But the circumstance that struck Louise most upon entering, was the sharp, pungent atmosphere

which filled the floating apartment—so noxious, that it produced a violent fit of coughing as soon as she inhaled it. Nor was her conductor much less affected.

"*Paff!*" he exclaimed, as soon as he could speak; "our master is at his work again, brewing devil's drinks and fly-powder. Never mind, *ma pauvrette;* you will be used to it, directly."

The woman had risen from her seat when they entered, and was now casting a suspicious glance at Louise, and an inquiring one at her husband, alternately.

"Oh! you have nothing to be jealous of, Bathilde," he continued, addressing his better half. "Here is a country woman from Béziers, without a friend, and dying for love, for aught I know to the contrary. We must give her a lodging for to-night, at least."

"Do not let me intrude," said Louise, turning to the female. "I fear that I am already doing so. Let me be taken on shore again, and I will not put you to inconvenience."

"Not a word of that again, or I shall swear that you are no Languedocian. A pretty journey you would have, admitting you went to your lodgings, from here to the Rue Mouffetard, for I suppose you live near the Gobelins. There are dangerous vagabonds at night in the Faubourg Saint Marcel; and they say the young clerks of Cluny study more graceless things in the streets than learned ones at their college. A woman, young and comely like yourself, was found in the Bièvre the other morning. I saw them carrying the body to the Val de Grace myself."

While Benoit was thus talking, his wife had been doing the humble honours of their floating establishment towards their new guest. She had placed her own seat near the fire for Louise; for the evening was chilly, the more so on the river; and next proceeded to lay their frugal supper on the table, consisting of dried apples, a long log of bread, and a measure of wine.

"You will not incommode us, *petite*," said Bathilde. "You can sleep with me, and Benoit will make his bed amongst the sacks, where he dozes when he has to keep up the doctor's fires all night long."

Bathilde was not two years older than Louise; yet she felt that, being married, she had the position of a matron, and so she patronised her. But it was done with an innocent and good heart.

"Ay, I could sleep anywhere near the old mill-wheel," said Benoit. "Its clicking sends me off like a cradle. The only time I never close my eyes, is at the Toussaint; and that is because I've stopped it. Look at it there! plodding on just as if it were a living thing."

The charlatan's assistant looked affectionately at the beam which was working at the end of the chamber; and then wishing to vent the loving fulness of his heart upon something more sensible of it, he pinched his wife's round chin, and kissed her rosy face with a smack that echoed again.

"Hush!" cried Bathilde; "you will disturb the doctor." And she pointed to a door leading from the apartment.

"Is there any one else here, then?" asked Louise.

"Only my master," replied Benoit. "He came to lodge here when he first arrived in Paris, because he did not want to be disturbed, as he said. Well, he has his wish. His rent pays ours, and I get a trifle for playing his fool. Mass! think of this attire in Languedoc!"

They proceeded with their supper. Benoit fell to it as though he had fasted for a week, but Louise tasted nothing, in spite of all the persuasions of her honest entertainers. She sipped some wine which they insisted on her taking, and then remained sad and pale, in the deepest despondency.

Her gloom appeared to affect the others. The charlatan looked but sadly for his calling; and every now and then, Bathilde turned her large bright eyes from Benoit to Louise, and then back again to Benoit, as if more fully to comprehend the unwonted introduction of her young guest; and sometimes she would assume a little grimace, meant for jealousy, until her husband reassured her with a pantomimical kiss blown across the table.

At last Benoit and his helpmate thought it would be kinder to leave her to her sorrow; and they began, as was

their custom, to talk about the events of the day. The interruption of the two young cavaliers was of course mentioned, and was exciting the earnest attention of Louise, when the conversation was broken by the door opening suddenly, at the end of the apartment, and the physician of the Carrefour du Châtelet passed hastily out, and approached the table.

"Hist! Benoit!" he exclaimed, in a low and somewhat flurried tone; "some one has gained the mills besides ourselves. Who is that girl?" he said sharply, as his eye fell upon Louise.

"A poor countrywoman whom I have given a lodging to for the night. She works at the Gobelins."

The physician moved towards Louise, and clutching her arm with some force, glared at her with terrible earnestness, as he continued,

"You know how this has come about. Who is it?—answer on your sacred soul."

The terrified girl, for a minute, could scarcely reply, until the other repeated his question, when she exclaimed,

"I do not understand you, monsieur. I have no one in Paris with whom I can exchange a word—none, but these good people."

"I do not see how any one could have got to the mill," said Benoit. "I brought over the boat myself from the quay."

"And you have not moved from this room?"

"Never, since I disembarked with this maiden."

"It is strange," said the physician. "I had put out my lamp, the better to watch the colour of a flame that played about the crucible. The lights from the bridge fell upon the window, and I distinctly saw the shadow of a human being, if human it were, pass across the curtain on the outside. Hark! there is a noise above!"

There could be now no doubt: the shuffling of feet was plainly audible on the roof of the floating house; but of feet evidently moved with caution.

"I will go and see," cried Benoit, taking down the lamp, which was suspended from one of the beams. "If they are intruders, I can soon warn them off."

"No, no!" cried the chemist eagerly: "do not leave the room; barricade the door; no one must enter."

"We have nothing to barricade it with," replied Benoit, getting frightened himself at the anxiety of his master. "Oh dear! oh dear! we shall be burnt for witches on the Grêve. I see it all."

"Pshaw! imbecile!" cried the other. "Here, you have the table, these chairs. Bring sacks, grain, anything!"

The women had risen from their seats, and retreated into a corner of the apartment near the stove. The physician seized the table, and, implicitly followed by Benoit, was moving towards the door, when there was a violent knocking without, and a command to open it immediately.

"It is by the king's order," said Benoit: "we cannot resist."

He reached the door, and unfastened it before the physician could pull him back, although he attempted to do so. It flew open, and a party of the *Guet Royal* entered the room, headed by the chief of the marching watch of Paris.

"Antonio Exili," said the captain, pointing his sword towards the physician, "commonly known as the Doctor St. Antonio, I arrest you in the king's name!"

"*Exili!*" ejaculated Benoit, gazing half aghast at his master.

CHAPTER III.

THE ARREST OF THE PHYSICIAN.

The name pronounced was that of an Italian, terrible throughout Europe; at the mention of whom even crowned heads quailed, and whose black deeds, although far more than matters of surmise, had yet been transacted with such consummate skill and caution as to baffle the keenest inquiries, both of the police and of the profession. Exili, who had been obliged to fly from Rome, as one of the

fearful secret poisoners of the epoch, was instructed in his hellish art, it has been presumed, by a Sicilian woman named Spara. She had been the confidante and associate of the infamous Tofana, from whom she acquired the secret at Palermo, where the dreaded preparation which bore her name was sold, with little disguise, in small glass phials, ornamented with some holy image.

Six years previous to the commencement of our romance, a number of suspicious deaths in Rome caused unusual vigilance to be exercised by the police of that city, little wanting at all times in detective instinct; and the result was, the discovery of a secret society (of which Spara was at the head, ostensibly as a fortune-teller), to whose members the various deaths were attributed; inasmuch, amongst other suspicious circumstances, as Spara had frequently, in her capacity of sybil, predicted their occurrence. Betrayed through the jealousy of one of the party, all in the society were arrested and put to the torture; a few were executed, and others escaped. Amongst these last Exili eluded the punishment no less due to him than to the rest, and flying from Italy, came into France, and finally established himself at Paris, under an assumed name; but his real condition was tolerably well understood by the police, although his depth and care never gave them tangible ground for an arrest. He practised as a simple physician. In this portion of his career little occurred to throw suspicion on his calling; but, driven at length by poverty to sink his dignity in a less precarious method of gaining a livelihood, he had appeared as the mere charlatan, and it was now hinted that whilst he sold the simplest drugs to the people, poisons of the most subtle and violent nature could be obtained through his agency. Where they came from no one was aware, but their source was attributed, like many other uncertain ones, to the devil. These suspicions were, however, principally confined to the police; the mass looked upon him as an itinerant physician of more than ordinary talents.

Those, indeed, to whom he had administered potions had been known to die; but his skill in pharmacy enabled him to produce his effects as mere aggravated symptoms of

the disease he was ostensibly endeavouring to cure. And chemical science in those days was so far behind its modern state, that no delicate tests of the presence of poisons—even of those offering the strongest precipitates —were known. At the present time, our poisons have increased to tenfold violence and numbers; yet in no instance, scarcely, could an atom be now administered, without its presence, decomposed or entire, being laid bare on the test-glass of the inquirer.

"Exili," again gasped Benoit, as he drew nearer his wife and Louise, in an agony of fear, also, that the part he bore in the public displays of the medicine would involve him in the punishment.

"I must have your authority, sir, before I can be arrested," replied Exili, as we may now call him, with singular and suddenly assumed calmness; "and you must also prove that I am the man of whom you are in search."

"I can satisfy you on both points," cried a voice from amidst the guard.

The soldiers fell back on either side of the doorway, and Gaudin de Sainte-Croix, the young officer who had held parley with him on the Carrefour de Châtelet, entered the room.

"I know you to be the same Antonio Exili," he continued; "you confessed it to me yourself but this afternoon. And here," he added, as he held a paper towards him, "is the *lettre-de-cachet* for your arrest."

The girl, who had started at the first sound of Sainte-Croix's voice, now leant anxiously forward as he entered the room; and when she saw him, a sudden and violent cry of surprise burst from her lips. She checked herself, however, whilst he was speaking, but as soon as he had finished, she rushed up to him, and grasping his arm, cried, "Gaudin!"

"Louise!—you here!" exclaimed Sainte-Croix. "I thought you were in Languedoc," he added, dropping his voice, whilst his brow contracted into an angry frown. He was evidently ill-prepared for the rencontre, and but little pleased at it.

The Italian took advantage of the temporary diversion

afforded by the interview. With the nerve and muscular strength of a young man, he vaulted over the table against which he had been standing, and rushed into his own apartment, closing the door, which was of massy wood, against his pursuers. But this only caused the delay of an instant. Finding that their partizans made not the least effect upon the thick panels, the officer in command ordered them to take a large beam that was lying on the floor, apparently a portion of some old mill-machinery, and use it as a battering ram. It was lifted by six or eight of the guard, and hurled with all their united strength against the door. For the first two or three blows it resisted their efforts, but at last gave way with a loud crash, and the laboratory of the physician lay open before them.

"*En avant!*" cried the captain of the watch; "and take him, dead or alive. Follow me."

The officer entered the room, but had scarcely gone two steps, when he uttered a loud and spasmodic scream, and fell on the floor. A guard, who was following him, reeled back against his fellows, with the same cry, but fainter; and immediately afterwards a dense and acrid vapour rolled in heavy-coloured fumes into the outer chamber. Its effects were directly perceptible upon the rest, who fell back, seized with violent and painful contractions of the windpipe; and the man who had kept close upon their commander, was now also struck down by the deadly vapour, which a violent draught of cold air spread around them. But they had time to perceive that a window at the end of the small laboratory was open, and that Exili had passed through it, and escaped to the river.

"It is poison! it is poison!" cried Benoit lustily, apparently most anxious to give every information in his power respecting his late tenant, and turning fool's evidence in his eagerness to clear his own character. "He has broken the bottle it was in. I know it well. He killed some dogs with it, before the Pâques, as if they had been shot. Keep back, on your lives!"

During this short and hurried scene, Louise had not once quitted her hold of Sainte-Croix, but, in extreme agitation, the result of mingled terror and surprise, still clung to him.

"Beware! beware!" continued Benoit; "I know it well, I tell you. He has water that burns like red irons; and he pours it on money, which leaves it blue. It will kill you! He has broken the bottle that held it."

And he continued reiterating these phrases with almost frantic volubility, until one of the guard, at the risk of his life, pulled to the shattered door, as well as he was able.

"Gaudin!" cried Louise, as she fell at his feet, still hanging to his arm and his rich sword-belt. "Gaudin; only one word — tell me that you have not forgotten me — that you still love me."

"Yes, yes, Louise; I still love you," he replied, in a careless and impatient tone. "But this is not the place for scenes like these; you might, in delicacy, have spared me this annoying persecution."

"Persecution, Gaudin! I have given up all for you; I have abandoned everything, even the hope of salvation for my own soul; I have wandered, day after day, through the heartless streets of Paris, or worked at the Gobelins until my spirits have been crushed to the earth, and all my strength gone, by the struggle to support myself; and all in the hope of seeing you again. Tell me — do you still care for me, or am I a clog upon your life in this gay city?"

"Not now, Louise; not now," returned Sainte-Croix, "another time. This is ill-judged; it is unkind. I tell you that I still love you. There, now let me go, and do not thus lower me before these people."

"And when shall I see you again?"

"At any time — to-morrow — whenever you please — at any place," continued Sainte-Croix, endeavouring to disembarrass himself from her grasp. "There, see! I am wanted by the guard."

"Gaudin! only one kind word, spoken as you once used to do: to tell me where I may see you: to show me that you do not hate me."

"Pshaw! Louise, this is childish at such a moment. Leave go my arm, if you would escape an injury. You see I am wanted; you are mad thus to annoy me."

"Heaven knows I have had enough to make me so," returned the girl, struggling with the hands of the other as he tried to free himself from her grasp. "But, Gaudin! I beg it on my knees, one, only one, kind word. Ah!"

She screamed with pain, as Sainte-Croix, in desperation, seized her wrists, and twisting them fiercely round, forced her to loose her hold. And then casting her from him, with no light power, she fell senseless on the floor at the feet of Bathilde, who had remained completely paralysed since the commencement of the hurried scene.

"He will escape by the river," cried the second in command of the night watch. "We must follow him."

Pressing onward with the rest, Sainte-Croix passed from the chamber and stood on the edge of the floating tenements. The boat in which Benoit had arrived was still lying where it had been left fastened by a cord. He directly ordered two of the men into it, and entering himself, divided the cord that held it with his sword, and then put forth upon the river. The others gained the roof of the mill, and they were there joined by some members of the *garde bourgeois*, who had descended, and were still coming down by a rope-ladder, depending from the window of one of the old gabled houses upon the Pont Notre Dame. This was evidently the manner in which they had gained access to the mill, when their feet had first been heard overhead by Exili.

In the meanwhile, the object of their pursuit had escaped by the window, as has been seen, and dropped into the hollow of one of the lighters that floated the entire structure, with the intention of passing underneath the mill-floor to the spot at which another small boat, used by himself alone, was fastened. But it was here quite dark, and the passage was one of extreme caution, being amongst the timbers of the woodwork upholding the mill, between some of which the large black wheels were turning, as the deep and angry water foamed and roared below them, lashing the slippery beams or leaping wildly over the narrow ledges of the lighters.

Supplied with torches by the *garde bourgeois*, the others

pervaded every portion of the mill, and at last came upon the track of their object, his lace collar having caught some projecting woodwork in his flight. One or two of them leaped boldly down into the lighters, and the others clung round the structure above, upon frightfully insecure foot-room. They were now under the apartment, and entirely amidst the timbers of the works. The light of their torches revealed to them Exili passing onward, at the peril of his life, to gain the boat, but close before them.

A cry of recognition broke from two or three of the guard, and the Italian, as a last chance, caught hold of a beam which overhung the wheels, contriving, at an imminent risk, to pass himself across the channel of the current by swinging one hand before the other. Those who had regarded his general appearance, would scarcely have given him credit for so much power.

He gained the other side. One of the guard immediately attempted to follow him, and seized the beam; but he had not crossed half way before his strength failed him, his armour proving too heavy, together with his body, for his arms to sustain; and he fell upon the wheel as it turned, entangling his legs in the float-boards. He was borne beneath the current, and immediately afterwards reappeared on the wheel, throwing his arms wildly about for help. Scarcely had a cry escaped his lips, when he again passed beneath the surface; the water disentangled him, and bore him down the stream for an instant, until he sank, and was seen no more.

Meanwhile Exili was endeavouring to unfasten his boat, and the *garde bourgeois*, passing round the other side of the mill, had arrived close to where he was stationed, cutting off his retreat in that direction. There was now no chance but the river; and without a moment's hesitation, he plunged into the boiling current, trusting to the darkness for his escape. At the same moment a bourgeois threw off his upper garments, and letting himself down the outer side of the lighter into the river, where the stream was somewhat less powerful, called for a torch, which he contrived to keep above the water in his left hand, striking out vigorously with his right.

It was a singular chase. Both were evidently practised swimmers, and more than once Exili eluded his pursuer by diving below the surface and allowing him to pass beyond the mark. Several times, as they approached, he made a clutch at the torch, or tried to throw back a palmfull of water at its light, knowing if he could but reach any of the houses on the site of the present Quai Desaix, he should be sheltered in some of the secret refuges of the Cité. And once, indeed, he turned at bay in deep water, locking on to the guard in a manner which would soon have proved fatal to both, when the boat containing Sainte-Croix shot across the river, and came up to where they were struggling. His capture was the work of half a minute, and he was dragged into the boat.

"So, *mon enfant*," said Gaudin, as the dripping object of all this turmoil was placed, breathless and dripping, in the stern, "you thought we stood in somewhat different positions, I will be bound, this afternoon."

Then addressing himself to the men who were rowing, he added,

"The Port au Foin is the nearest landing-place for the Rue St. Antoine. And then to the Bastile!"

The stream was violent below the bridge; for the mill-boats obstructed the free course of the river, and the Seine was still swoln and turbid from the spring floods. But the rowers plied their oars manfully, and, directed by one of the guard, who kept at the head of the boat with the torch, were not long in arriving at the landing-place indicated by Sainte-Croix, which was exactly on the site of the present Pont Louis Philippe, conducting from the Place de la Grêve to the back of Notre Dame.

Exili remained perfectly silent, but was trembling violently — more, however, from his late immersion than from fear. His countenance was pale and immovable, as seen by the glare of the torch; and he compressed his under lip with his teeth until he nearly bit it through. Neither did Sainte-Croix exchange another word with any of his party; but, shrouded in his cloak, remained perfectly silent until the boat touched the rude steps of the Port au Foin.

A covered vehicle, opening behind, and somewhat like a modern deer-cart, was waiting on the quay, with some armed attendants. The arrival of the prisoner was evidently expected. By the direction of Sainte-Croix he was carefully searched by the guard, and everything being taken from him, he was placed in the vehicle, whither his captor also followed him. The doors were then closed, and the men with torches placing themselves at the sides and in front of the vehicle, the cortège moved on.

It was a rough journey, then, to make from the Seine to the Bastile; and it would have been made in perfect darkness but for the lights and cressets of the watch. For the night was advancing; the lanterns in the windows had burnt out, or been extinguished; and the tall glooming houses, which rose on either side of the Rue Geoffry Lanier, by which thoroughfare they left the river side, threw the road into still deeper obscurity, their only lights being observable in the windows high up, where some industrious artisan was late at work. A rude smoky lamp hung from the interior of the vehicle, and, by its gleam, Sainte-Croix was watching his prisoner in silence. At length Exili spoke —

"You have been playing a deep game; and this time Fortune favours you. But you took her as the discarded mistress of many others; and she will in turn jilt you."

"Say rather we have both struggled for her, and you lost her by your own incautious proceedings," replied Sainte-Croix. "We were both at the brink of a gulf, on a frail precipice, where the fall of one was necessary to the safety of the other. You are now my victim; to-morrow I might have been yours."

"And whence comes the *lettre-de-cachet?*"

"From those who have the power to give it. Had you been more guarded in your speech on the carrefour to-day, you might have again practised on the credulity of the dupes that surrounded you."

"For what term is my imprisonment?"

"During the pleasure of the Minister of Police; and that may depend upon mine. Our secrets are too terrible

for both to be free at once. You should not have let me know that you thought me in your power."

"Has every notion of honour departed from you?" asked Exili.

"Honour!" replied Sainte-Croix, with a short contemptuous laugh; "honour! and between such as we have become. How could you expect honour to influence me, when we have so long despised it — when it is but a bubble name with the petty gamesters of the world — the watchword of cowardice fearing detection?"

There was a halt in the progress of the carriage as it now arrived at the outer gate of the Bastile. Then came the challenge and the answer; the creaking of the chains that let down the huge drawbridge upon the edge of the outer court; and the hollow thundering of the wheels over its timber. It stopped at the inner portal; and when the doors were opened, the governor waited at the carriage to receive the new prisoner.

But few words were exchanged. The signature of the *lettre-de-cachet*, once recognised, was all that was required, and Exili was ordered to descend. He turned to Sainte-Croix as he was about to enter the gate, and with a withering expression of revenge and baffled anger, exclaimed,

"You have the game in your own hands at present. Before the year is out my turn will have arrived. Remember!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE STUDENTS OF 1665.

NIGHT came on: dark, cold, tempestuous. The fleeting beauty of the spring evening had long departed; the moon became totally invisible through the thick clouds that had been soaring onwards in gloomy masses from the south; and the outlines of the houses were no longer to be traced against the sky. All was merged in one deep impenetrable obscurity. There were symptoms of a turbulent night.

The wind whistled keenly over the river and the dreary flats adjoining; and big drops of rain fell audibly upon the paved court and drawbridge of the Bastile.

The heavy gates slowly folded upon each other with a dull wailing sound, which spoke the hopeless desolation of all that they enclosed. And when the strained and creaking chains of the drawbridge had once more lowered the platform, Sainte-Croix entered the vehicle by which he had arrived, and, giving some directions to the guard, left the precincts of the prison.

As the carriage lumbered down the Rue St. Antoine, a smile of triumph gleamed across the features of its occupant, mingled with the expression of satire and mistrust which characterised every important reflection that he gave way to. A dangerous enemy had been, as he conceived, rendered powerless. There was but one person in the world of whom he stood in awe; and that one was now, on the dark authority of a *lettre-de-cachet*, in the inmost dungeon of the Bastile. The career of adventures that he had planned to arrive at the pinnacle of his ambitious hopes — and Gaudin de Sainte-Croix was an adventurer in every sense of the word — now seemed laid open before him without a cloud or hindrance. The tempestuous night threw no gloomy forebodings upon his soul. The tumult of his passions responded wildly to that of the elements; or appeared to find an echo in the gusts of the angry wind, as it swept, loud and howling, along the thoroughfares.

The carriage, by his orders, passed the Pont Marie, and, crossing the Ile St. Louis, stopped before a house, still existing, in the Rue des Bernardins, where his lodging was situated. The street leads off from the quay on the left bank of the Seine, opposite the back of Notre Dame; but, at the date of our story, was nearly on the outskirts of the city. Here he discharged the equipage with the guard; and, entering the house for a few minutes, returned enveloped in a large military cloak, and carrying a lighted cresset on the end of a halberd.

He pressed hurriedly forward towards the southern extremity of the city, passing beside the abbey of Sainte Geneviève, where the Pantheon now stands. Beyond this,

on the line of streets which at present bear the name of the "Rues des Fosses," the ancient walls of Paris had, until within a year or two of this period, existed; but the improvements of Louis the Fourteenth, commenced at the opposite extremity of the city, had razed the fortifications to the ground. Those to the north, levelled and planted with trees, now form the Boulevards; the southern line had, as yet, merely been thrown into ruins; and the only egress from the town was still confined to the point where the gates had stood, kept tolerably clear for the convenience of travellers, and more especially those dwelling in the increasing faubourgs. Even these ways were scarcely practicable. The water, for want of drains, collected into perfect lakes, and the deep ruts were left unfilled, so that the thoroughfare, hazardous by day, became doubly so at night; in fact, it was a matter of some enterprise to leave or enter the city at its southern outlet.

The rain continued to fall; and the cresset that Gaudin carried, flickering in the night-winds, oftentimes caused him to start and put himself on his guard, at the fitful shadows it threw on the dismantled walls and towers that bordered the way. At last a violent gust completely extinguished it, and he would have been left in a most unpleasant predicament, being totally unable to proceed or retrace his steps in the perfect obscurity, had not a party of the marching watch opportunely arrived. Not caring to be recognised, Sainte-Croix slouched his hat over his face, and giving the countersign to the Chevalier du Guet, requested a light for his cresset. The officer asked him a few questions as to what he had seen; and stated that they were taking their rounds in consequence of the increasing *brigandages* committed by the scholars dwelling in the Quartier Latin, as well as the inhabitants of the Faubourgs St. Jacques and St. Marcel, between whom an ancient rivalry in vagabondising and robbery had long existed. And, indeed, as we shall see, many high in position in Paris were at this period accustomed to "take the road"—some from a reckless spirit of adventure; others with a desire of making up their income squandered at the gaming-table,

or in the lavish festivals which the taste of the age called forth.

He passed the contrescarpe, and had reached the long straggling street of the faubourg, when two men rushed from between the pillars which supported the rude houses, and ordered him to stop. Gaudin was immediately on his defence. He hastily threw off his cloak, and drew his sword, parrying the thrust that one of the assailants aimed at him, but still grasping his cresset in his left hand, which the other strove to seize. They were both masked; and pressed him somewhat hardly, as the foremost, in a voice he thought he recognised, demanded his purse and mantle.

"*Aux voleurs!*" shouted Sainte-Croix, not knowing how many of the party might be in ambush. There was no reply, except the echo to his own voice. But, as he spoke, his chief assailant told the other, who had wrested the light away, to desist; and drawing back, pulled off his mask and revealed the features of the Marquis of Brinvilliers — the companion of Sainte-Croix that afternoon on the Carrefour du Châtelet.

"Gaudin's voice, a livre to a sou!" exclaimed the marquis.

"Antoine!" cried his friend as they recognised each other. "It is lucky I cried out, although no help came. It takes a sharper eye and a quicker arm than mine to parry two blades at once."

The two officers looked at each othen for a minute, and then broke into a burst of laughter; whilst the third party took off his hat and humbly sued for forgiveness.

"And Lachaussée, too!" continued Sainte-Croix, as he perceived it was one of his dependants. "The chance is singular enough. I was even now on my way to the Gobelins to find you, rascal."

"Then we are not on the same errand?" asked the marquis.

"If you are out as a *coup-bourse*, certainly not. What devil prompted you to this venture? A woman?" asked Sainte-Croix.

"No devil half so bad," replied Brinvilliers; "but the fat Abbé de Cluny. He goes frequently to the Gobelins

after dark; it is not to order tapestry only for his hotel. Since the holy sisterhood of Port-Royal have moved to the Rue de la Bourbe, he seeks bright eyes elsewhere."

"I see your game," answered Gaudin; "you are deeper in debt than in love. But it is no use waiting longer. This is not the night for a man to rest by choice in the streets; and my cry appears at last to have had an effect upon the drowsy faubourgs."

As he spoke, he directed the attention of Brinvilliers to one of the upper windows of a house whence a sleepy *bourgeois* had at last protruded his head, enveloped in an enormous convolution of hosiery. He projected a lighted candle before him, as he challenged the persons below; but, ere the question reached them, it was extinguished by the rain, and all was again dark and silent.

Sainte-Croix directed Lachaussée to pile together the embers in the cresset, which the brief struggle had somewhat disarranged; and then, as the night-wind blew them once more into a flame, he took the arm of the marquis, and, preceded by the overlooker of the Gobelins passed down the Rue Mouffetard.

They stopped at an old and blackened house, supported like the others upon rough pillars of masonry, which afforded a rude covered walk under the projecting stories; and signalised from the rest by a lantern projecting over the doorway. Such fixed lights were then very rare in Paris; and this was why the present was raised to the dignity of an especial sign; and the words "*à la lanterne*" rudely painted on its transparent side betokened a house of public entertainment. Within the range of its light the motto "*Urbis securitas et nitor*" was scrawled along the front of the casement.

"I shall give up my plan for to-night," said Brinvilliers as they reached the door. "The weather has possibly kept the abbé in the neighbourhood of the Gobelins. You can shelter here: there are some *mauvais garçons* still at table, I will be bound, that even Bras-d'Acier himself would shrink from grappling with."

Thus speaking, he knocked sharply at the door with the handle of his sword, which he had kept unsheathed

since his rencontre with Sainte-Croix. A murmur of voices, which had been audible upon their arriving was instantly hushed, and after a pause of a few seconds a challenge was given from within. Brinvilliers answered it: the door was opened, and Sainte-Croix entered the cabaret, followed by Lachaussée.

"You are coming too, Antoine?" asked Gaudin of his companion, as the latter remained on the sill.

"Not this evening," replied the marquis. "You wished to see Lachaussée, and this is the nearest spot where you could find shelter without scrambling on through the holes and quagmires to the Gobelins."

"But I know nobody here."

"Possibly they may know you, and my introduction is sufficient. I have other affairs which must be seen to this evening, since my first plan has failed. You will be with us to-morrow?"

"Without fail," replied Gaudin.

Brinvilliers commended his companion to the care of the host, and took his leave; whilst Sainte-Croix and Lachaussée were conducted into an inner apartment in the rear of the house.

It was a low room, with the ceiling supported by heavy blackened beams. The plaster of the walls was, in places, broken down; in others covered with rude charcoal drawings and mottoes. A long table was placed in the centre of the apartment; and over this was suspended a lamp which threw a lurid glare upon the party around it.

This was composed of a dozen young men whom Sainte-Croix directly recognised to be scholars of the different colleges. They were dressed in every style of fashion according to their tastes — one would not have seen appearances more varied in the Paris students of the present day. Some still kept to the fashions of the preceding reigns — the closely clipped hair, pointed beard and ring of moustache surrounding the mouth. Others had a semi-clerical habit, and others again assimilated to the dress of the epoch; albeit the majority wore their own hair. But in one thing they appeared all to agree. Large wine-cups

were placed before each, and flagons passed quickly from one to the other round the table.

They stared at Sainte-Croix as he entered with his attendant, and were silent. One of them, however, recognised him, and telling the others that he was a friend, made a place for him at his side, whilst Lachaussée took his seat at the chimney corner on a rude settle.

"Your name, my worthy seigneur?" exclaimed one of the party at the head of the table; "we have no strangers here. Philippe Glazer, tell your friend to answer."

"My name is Gaudin de Sainte-Croix. I am a captain in his Majesty's Normandy regiment. What is yours?"

The collected manner in which the new comer answered the question evidently made an impression on the chairman. He was a good-looking young man, with long, dark hair, and black eyes, clad in a torn mantle evidently put on for the nonce, with an old cap adorned with shells upon his head; and holding a knotty staff, fashioned like a crutch, for a sceptre. He made a slight obeisance, and replied,

"Well — you are frank with me; I will be the same. I have two names, and answer to both equally. In this society of Gens de la Courte Epée *, I am called 'Le Grand Coësre;' at the Hôtel Dieu they know me better as Camille Theria, of Liége, in the United Netherlands."

At a sign from the speaker, one of the party took a bowl from before him, and pushed it along the table towards Sainte-Croix. There were a few pieces of small money in it, and Gaudin directly perceiving their drift threw in some more. A sound of acclamation passed round the table, and he immediately perceived that he had risen to the highest pitch in their estimation.

"He is one of us?" cried Theria. "*Allons!* Glazer — the song — the song."

The student addressed directly commenced; the others singing the chorus, and beating time with their cups.

* "Ces grades se composent ordinairement d'écoliers. On les nommait 'gens de la courte épée' à cause des ciseaux qu'ils portaient pour couper les bourses."—*Dulaure.*

GLAZER'S SONG.

I.

Ruby bubbling from the flask,
Send the grape's bright blood around;
Throw off steady life's cold mask,
Every earthly care confound.
Here no rules are known,
Buvons!
Here no schools we own,
Trinquons!
Let wild glee and revelry
Sober thought dethrone.
Plan! Plan! Plan!
Rataplan!

II.

Would you Beauty's kindness prove?
Drink! faint heart ne'er gain'd a prize.
Hath a mistress duped your love?
Drink! and fairer forms will rise.
Clasped may be the zone,
Buvons!
Even to the throne.
Trinquons!
But full well the students know
Beauty is their own.
Plan! Plan! Plan!
Rataplan!

III.

Soaring thoughts our minds entrance,
Now we seem to spurn the ground.
See, the lights begin to dance,
Whirling madly round and round.
Still the goblet drain,
Buvons!
Till each blazing vein
Trinquons!
Sends fresh blood in sparkling flood
To the reeling brain.
Plan! Plan! Plan!
Rataplan!

"Your voice ought to make your fortune, Philippe," said Sainte-Croix, who appeared to know the student intimately.

"*Pardieu!* it does me little service. Theria, there, who cannot sing a note, keeps all the *galanteries* to himself. Ho! Maitre Camille! here I pledge your last conquest." And he raised his cup as he added, "Marie-Marguerite de Brinvilliers!"

Sainte-Croix started at the name; his eyes, flashing with anger, passed rapidly from one to the other of the two students.

"*Chut!*" cried another of the students, a man of small stature, who was dressed in the court costume of the period, but shabbily, and with every point exaggerated.

"*Chut!* Monsieur perchance knows la belle Marquisse, and will not bide to hear her name lipped amongst us?"

The student had noticed the rapid change and expression of Sainte-Croix's countenance.

"No, no, you are mistaken," said Gaudin. "I am slightly acquainted with the lady. I served with her husband."

"Jean Blacquart," said Glazer, with much solemnity, to the scholar who had last spoken, "if you interrupt the conversation again, I shall let out your Gascon blood with the cook's spit, and then drop you into the Bièvre. Remember it runs underneath the window."

The Gascon—for so he was—was immediately silent.

"The Captain Gaudin cannot know less of La Brinvilliers than I do," continued Theria, "save by report, as a charitable and spirited lady. I met her at mass a fortnight since, at the Jacobins in the Rue St. Honoré, and escorted her from a tumult that rose in the church. I might have improved on my acquaintance, had that senseless Blacquart permitted me."

The scholars looked towards Blacquart, and simultaneously broke into the same kind of noise they would have made in chasing an animal from the room. The Gascon was evidently the butt of the society.

"Explain!" cried several to Theria. "What was the tumult owing to?"

"A woman, of course," answered Camille. "You know La Duménil?"

"Proceed, proceed," exclaimed the others. The name was apparently well known amongst the scholars.

"Well, her *laquais* stumbled against the chair on which Madame de la Beaume was kneeling, and got a box on the ears from the latter for his stupidity, that rang all through the church. La Duménil took part with her servant, and soundly abused the other, to which La Beaume replied as heartily, and the service was stopped."

"The quarrel must have been amusing," observed Glazer.

"*Ventrebleu!* the women in the *halles* and markets would have turned pale at their salutations. At last La

Duménil threw a missal at her opponent's head, which well-nigh brought her to the ground. The people collected about them, and Madame de Brinvilliers was nearly crushed by the crowd, when I rescued her and led her to the porch."

"And what said she, Camille?" inquired Glazer.

"She was thanking me earnestly, and might have expressed something more, when that no-witted Blacquart spoilt everything by calling me back again. In his Gascon chivalry to defend La Beaume, he had drawn his sword against Duménil."

"I think that was somewhat courageous though," returned Glazer with mock approbation. "Did you really do this, Jean?"

"On my faith I did," answered the Gascon, brightening up; "and would do it again. I should like to see the woman in Paris that I am afraid of."

A roar of applause greeted Blacquart's heroism, and the attention of the party was immediately turned towards the Gascon, to the great relief of Sainte-Croix, who during the anecdote had been ill at ease. He could have added that he had himself escorted the Marchioness from the Jacobins when Theria was recalled.

"I propose," cried Camille, "that, for his bravery, Jean Blacquart be invested with the ancient order of Montfaucon."

"Agreed," cried the others, rising and surrounding the Gascon, whose countenance betrayed a mixed expression of self-conceit and apprehension.

"Ho, messire!" exclaimed Theria to Lachaussée, who had remained all the time sitting near the fire; "we appoint you master of the halter. Take it, and tie it round that beam."

He threw a cord to Sainte-Croix's attendant as he spoke, who fastened it to the point indicated, with its running noose hanging down.

"What are you going to do?" demanded Blacquart, getting somewhat terrified.

"To hang you," replied Camille: "but only for a little time. Glazer and myself will mind your pulse carefully;

and when you are nearly dead, you may depend upon it that we shall cut you down."

"But—I say—Theria—Philippe!" cried Jean, in an agony of fright. He had witnessed so many of their wild pranks, that he did not know what they were about to do.

"Père Camus," cried the master of the Gens de la Courte Epée to one of the party bearing a costume of the church—a broken-down and dissipated abbé. "Pére Camus, chant a mass for the departing courage of Jean Blacquart."

"*Au secours!*" shrieked the Gascon; "*au feu! aux valeurs! au —*"

His further cries for help were cut short by one of the scholars thrusting a baked apple into his mouth, and immediately tying his scarf over it. The miserable little Gascon was directly seized, and hoisted on to the table, in spite of his violent struggles, whilst the abbé commenced a profane chant, intended as a parody on some religious service.

Where their frolic might have ended cannot be defined. The consequences of the orgies in the time of Louis XIV., in every position of life, were little cared for; and the unhappy Jean might have been strangled by accident with very little compunction, had not a violent knocking at the door alarmed the revellers, and caused them to desist for the minute from their lawless proceedings. A silence ensued, unbroken, except by the efforts of the Gascon to release himself, in the course of which he kicked the flagons and goblets about in all directions.

"Open to the Garde Bourgeois!" cried a voice outside.

There was no resisting the command. The host unbarred the door, and a little pursy man, who looked like a perambulating triumphal car of apoplexy, entered the cabaret.

"Master Poncelet," he said to the host, as he shook his head until his face was a deep crimson, "this is against the law, and I must look to it, as answerable for the morality of the Faubourgs. We cannot allow this brawling four hours after curfew—we cannot allow it."

"If you had come two minutes later," said Blacquart,

as he forced himself from his tormentors, "you would have seen me a —"

Under what guise the Garde Bourgeois would have seen Jean Blacquart, was never made known to him. A back-handed blow from Theria overturned the Gascon into the corner of the room, from whence he did not care to arise, not knowing what reception might next await him.

"Maître Picard," said the host with respect, addressing the patrol, "these are learned clerks, scholars of Mazarin, and of Cluny, with some from the Hôtel Dieu. They seek the faubourgs for quiet and study."

"I cannot help it," Master Poncelet," replied the bourgeois; "the morality of St. Marcel requires the utmost vigilance of its superintendents. Messieurs, you must respect my authority, and put out all the lights directly."

"Call in your guard to do it," said Philippe Glazer; "we are not lackeys."

"My guard is now going round the Rue du Puits qui Parle," replied the bourgeois, "wherein is much evil congregated. I am here. Our good king Louis is the state. I am the guard."

"Thank you, thank you, Maître Picard," said Theria. "I respect you, although you made me a cap last year of a villanous fabric, and told me that it was the best cloth of Louvain; you forgot I breathed my first gasp of air in Brabant. And you are sure that the guard cannot put out our lights?"

"I have told you they are not near us," said the bourgeois, offended at being obliged to repeat the intelligence.

"Excellent!" observed Theria. "Philippe, close the door, and let Maître Picard take us all into custody."

Glazer immediately obeyed the command of their chairman, whilst the others huddled round the luckless little bourgeois, who began to feel remarkably uncomfortable.

"Respite the Gascon, and hang Maître Picard in his stead, by his heels," said Theria.

"I give you all warning!" cried Picard; "I give you all warning! I am a quartenier, and can punish you all. Keep your hands away!"

Sainte-Croix, at the first appearance of the bourgeois, had thrown his cloak over his shoulders, not wishing to be recognised in his military dress, and had retreated with Lachaussée into a corner of the room, whither Maître Picard followed him with an appealing glance, noting that his appearance was somewhat more respectable than that of the scholars.

"I tell you, you do this at your peril," screamed Picard. "The police show no mercy to the vagabonds and *mauvais garçons* who maltreat an enlightened bourgeois."

"We thank you for the hint," said Theria. "Ho! *mes enfans;* in consideration of Maître Picard's enlightenment, we incline to mercy and utility. Let us hang him before the door, and save our host's candles. La Reinie never thought of so grand an illumination as an enlightened bourgeois."

"Agreed!" cried the scholars. "*A la lanterne! a la lanterne!*"

The cry had not the terrible meaning which it carried a century afterwards, but it was sufficiently mischievous to offer but little relief to Maître Picard. In an instant he was borne off his legs, and hoisted on the shoulders of the scholars, whilst Philippe Glazer thrust a link into the fire, and when it was kindled, preceded the procession to the door. Some of his companions dragged out a table and a chair, in spite of the rain, into the street, and forming a kind of scaffold, they rapidly took down the lantern, and perched Maître Picard, link in hand, upon its iron support, directly removing every means of escape from beneath him.

CHAPTER V.

SAINTE-CROIX AND HIS CREATURE.

The poor little bourgeois was in a lamentable position. The iron work of the lamp was anything but trustworthy, and albeit a man of small stature, he was heavily inclined.

With one hand he grasped his unenviable seat, and with the other he sustained the link, not daring to put it out for fear of some new infliction that his tormentors might invent.

"*Salut!* Maître Picard," cried Theris, doffing his bonnet, "Who arrested Jean Sauval, at the Sorbonne, for taking the cloak from Bussi-Rabutin on the Pont Neuf?"

"*Filou!*" cried the bourgeois.

"Who pointed out to the watch where François de Chanvalon, the archbishop, went, instead of to Notre Dame? *Salut*, bourgeois!" cried Philippe Glazer, with another pretended obeisance.

And then the scholars joined their hands, and performed a wild dance around him.

"Stay awhile, stay awhile!" exclaimed Maître Picard. "Now you shall see what I can do. Here comes the Guet Royal. *Aux voleurs! aux voleurs!!*"

The little man was right. From his elevated position he had seen the guard with their lights turning round the corner of the Rue Mouffetard, and he now hailed them with all the force of his lungs, kicking his legs in nervous anxiety until one of his shoes fell off upon Glazer's head, who directly returned it, flinging it at the little man with a force that almost upset him from his treacherous position.

The scholars instantly took the alarm (for some of the mounted guard were riding down the street), and fled in all directions, along the narrow and dark outlets of the Faubourg St. Marcel. Lachaussée, who, with Sainte-Croix, had been a spectator of the scene, seized the officer by the arm, and drew him into the house.

"It will not do for you to be found here, monsieur," he said; "follow me — we can get off by the Bièvre."

He closed the door after them, and telling the host not to admit the guard, but let them break in if they chose, passed through the room lately occupied by the scholars, and, throwing open the window, stepped out upon the bank of the Bièvre — a small stream running from the south, which flows into the Seine a little above the present

Pont d'Austerlitz by the Jardin des Plantes. It was now swollen with the rains, and was rushing angrily by the narrow path, along which Lachaussée led the way, having once more closed the window.

They crept along, clinging like bats to the walls of the houses that bordered the stream, at the risk of falling into it every minute, until Lachaussée stopped at a small gate, to which he applied a pass-key. It opened, and Sainte-Croix found himself in an outer after-court of the Gobelins. This they crossed, and were immediately afterwards in one of the apartments apportioned to the superintendents.

Lachaussée raked together some embers on the hearth, which he soon blew into a flame, and then lighted a lamp; whilst Sainte-Croix once more threw off his cloak, and took his place on one of the settles.

"So," he exclaimed, "we are once more housed. Your night's adventure is so far to be considered fortunate, as I might have looked for you long enough here, it seems."

"The purse of the marquis wanted replenishing," replied Lachaussée in an easy tone. "You did not let me know you were coming, or I might have stayed at home."

"I am chilled and wearied," said Sainte-Croix; "have you no wine?"

"Better than ever paid duty in the city," said Lachaussée, producing a bottle from a closet. "They watch the town, but forget the river."

"That is right good Burgundy," observed Sainte-Croix, as he tasted it.

"The best that the vineyards of Auxerre can produce. One needs it in such a dismal outskirt, Heaven knows!"

"Your position might be worse."

"It might be much better," returned Lachaussée carelessly. "I am glad you have come. I spoke to the marquis about entering his service, for I am somewhat weary of the faubourgs; and he referred me to you. You do not want a character, I presume, or a reference?"

He gave out these words full of meaning, and looked earnestly at Sainte-Croix as he uttered them.

"You will remain here during my pleasure," replied the other, refilling his glass.

"And suppose it wearies me?"

"I shall tell you a story to amuse you and beguile the time," Gaudin answered. "But possibly you know it: it relates to an event that occurred some three years back at Milan."

Lachaussée was pouring out some wine for himself. He placed the cup down on the table, and regarded Sainte-Croix with a look of mingled fear and mistrust. Gaudin cast his eye round, and, perceiving that the attention of the other was arrested, continued:

"There were two soldiers staying at the Croce Bianca: one was an officer in the French service, the other a renegade who turned his back upon the Fronde, with the Prince de Condé; went with him into Spain to take up arms against his own country, and then, when the chances turned, deserted again and joined the French army. He must have been a double knave. What think you?"

Lachaussée gave no answer. He moved his lips in reply, but no sound escaped them.

"The resources of these two were nearly exhausted," resumed Sainte-Croix; "for they led a gallant life, when a French nobleman, rich and young, arrived at Milan. He was courted, fêted, in all circles, and he became introduced to the officer and his companion. They marked him for their prey; and one night, at the gaming-table, carried off a large sum of money, offering the noble his revenge on the following evening at the Croce Bianca. He embraced the chance, and came alone: fortune once more patronised him, and he gained back, not merely what he had lost, but every sou the others possessed in the world.

"There was a grand festival that evening given by one of the Borromeo family, and the officer departed to it, leaving the renegade and the nobleman still playing. In the middle of the fête, a mask approached the officer and slipped a letter into his hand, immediately quitting the assembly."

Sainte-Croix took a small pouncet-box from his breast,

and opened it. He then unfolded a scrap of paper, and continued:

"It read as follows: — 'Exili's potion has done its work. I have started with every thing to the frontier. Do not return to the Croce Bianca until after day-break.' The officer followed the advice; and, when he went back to the inn, the noble had been found dead in the room, with an empty phial of the terrible 'Manna of St. Nicholas de Barri'* clutched in his hand. He was presumed to have committed suicide, and the crime was, in twenty-four hours, hidden by the grave. The officer soon afterwards left Milan, and joined the other in Paris. His name was Gaudin de Sainte-Croix; the renegade, and real murderer, was called Lachaussée."

"What is the use of thus recalling all that has long past?" said Lachaussée, who, during Gaudin's story, had recovered his composure. "The same blow that strikes one, must hurl the other as well to damnation. Exili, who is known to be in Paris, could crush us both."

"Exili has been this night conveyed to the Bastille by a *lettre de cachet*," replied Sainte-Croix; "and this small piece of writing is enough to send you to join him. You were grumbling at your position: a subterranean cell in St. Antoine is less pleasant than this room at the Gobelins."

"I am as much at your disposal as at your mercy," returned Lachaussée, swallowing down a large draught of wine. "What next do you require of me?"

"No very unpleasant task," said Sainte-Croix. "It regards a woman, young, and fair enough, in all conscience. She has been working here, it seems, until a very short period since. Have you the name of Louise Gauthier amongst the artists of your *ateliers*?"

"Surely," replied Lachaussée; "a haughty minx enough. She left a day or two back, displeased with my attention; at least, she said so. I know not where she is gone."

A spasm crossed the features of Sainte-Croix during this speech of the superintendent, as he eyed him with an expression of contempt, amounting to disgust: but this passed, and he continued: —

* The "Manna of Saint Nicholas de Barri" was the name under which the *Aqua Tofana* was vended almost publicly.

"I can tell you: she is staying at the boat-mill below the Pont Notre Dame. You must go to-morrow and ascertain if she is still there. In the event of finding her, contrive so that she may be under your control; place her in some situation where she can never see me, or follow me, again. Do you understand!"

"Perfectly," returned Lachaussée; "though mine would not be the advice she would the soonest follow."

And then he added, as he regarded Sainte-Croix with a piercing look: —

"You have sent Exili to the Bastille. He might have aided us."

"No more!" cried Sainte-Croix, as he perceived the meaning of the other. "No more! I must be freed from her annoyance. Other prospects are opening to me, which her presence would cloud and destroy — but remember, you will be held answerable for the slightest injury that may affect her. If you want money, you have only to apply to me for it; but, by heaven! if every sou of what you draw is not appropriated to her sole use, your life shall answer for it. Am I understood?"

"You may count upon me," answered Lachaussée. "She shall never trouble you more. I believe the girl is entirely destitute. Perhaps she may look upon me with more favour when she finds how utterly dependent she will be upon my liberality."

"I shall not return to the Rue des Bernardins to-night," said Sainte-Croix. "You must accommodate me here, and to-morrow we will leave together on our separate missions."

There was a small apartment opening from the chamber wherein this conversation had taken place, to which Lachaussée conducted his companion. In the corner was a truckle-bed, without furniture. Gaudin threw his cloak upon it; and ordering the other to bring in the embers from the fire-place, and place them upon the hearth, closed the door as the task was finished, and prepared to retire to rest. He merely took off his upper garments, and then lay carelessly down upon the rude couch, placing his sword and pistols within his grasp, upon a chair by

the side. He heard the steps of Lachaussée retiring, and then all was still as the grave.

The cold air of the room rushed up the chimney, and fanned the *braise* into a light flame, which threw the mouldings of the room in flitting and grotesque shadows upon the walls and ceiling. As slumber came upon him, these assumed regular forms in his fevered imagination. He fancied Exili and Lachaussée appeared, and were dragging him down into a gulph, when Louise Gauthier stretched out her arm, and they could not pass her; and then another female, almost equally young and beautiful, with a countenance that was ever before him, sleeping and waking, in the rich apparel of a grand lady, drew him away from the rest, and told him to escape with her. He attempted to fly, but his feet were riveted to the ground, and the others were already in pursuit. They came nearer and nearer, and were about to lay hands on him once more, when in his agony he awoke, and, starting up on the bed, glared wildly about the room. By the light of the declining embers he perceived some one moving in the chamber, and, in the alarmed voice of a person suddenly aroused from a frightful dream, he challenged the intruder.

"It is I,— Lachaussée," cried the superintendent, for it was he. "I — I came to see what you wanted. You have been moaning bitterly in your sleep; I knew not what might happen to you."

"It was nothing," returned Gaudin. "I have drunk deeply this evening, and my sleep is fevered and troubled. Get you to-bed yourself, and do not enter this room again, except I summon you."

Lachaussée departed without a word; and, as soon as he was gone, Sainte-Croix moved the bed from the wall, and placed its foot against the door: he then once more lay down, but not for sleep. Every night-noise caused him to start up and listen anxiously for some minutes, in the apprehension that the treachery of Lachaussée might once more bring him to the room.

Daylight came slowly through the window, and the

sound of the early artisans assembling in the court-yards for their work was heard below, when he at last sank into a deep and unbroken morning slumber.

CHAPTER VI.

MAITRE GLAZER, THE APOTHECARY, AND HIS MAN, PANURGE, DISCOURSE WITH THE PEOPLE ON POISONS. — THE VISIT OF THE MARCHIONESS.

THERE was plenty to occupy the gossips the morning after the events of the preceding chapters, in the good city of Paris. The capture of Exili, with all the additions and exaggerations that word of mouth could promulgate, formed the only topic of conversation; nothing else was canvassed by the little knots of idlers who collected at the corners of the Pont Neuf and on the quays. There were few newspapers then to spread their simultaneous intelligence over the city. The first important journal, established under the auspices of Colbert, as yet appealed to a very limited number of the citizens beyond the scientific, and those interested in manufacturing and commercial improvements. There was a weekly paper, to be sure, from which the eager populace might have gained some news, had the occurrences come within the range of its time of publication; and the subject would have been dilated upon with especial care, for its originator was a physician. Le Docteur Renaudot had found, as the medical men of the present day are aware, that a knowledge of the current events of the time was thought as much of in a physician, by his patients, as a knowledge of his profession; and so he cultivated its acquisition to his great profit. But when a healthy season came, and he had less to do and talk about, it struck him that some advantage might accrue from distributing his news generally, in a printed form. He did so; the plan succeeded: and to this circumstance is the origin of the French press to be traced.

But all news connected with assaults and offences

found a loquacious Mercury in every member of the Garde Bourgeois. Not one who had assisted, on the antecedent evening, at the capture of Exili omitted to take all the credit to himself, as he babbled to a crowd of gaping auditors from his shop-window. Maître Picard, who had arrived, boiling over with indignation, at the office of the Prévôt in the Châtelet, found even his complaint against the scholars overlooked, in the more important excitement. The exposition of the horrible means, so long suspected, by which the Italian gained his living, and the strange death of the Chevalier du Guet by the poisoned atmosphere of the chamber, absorbed all other attention.

And well indeed it might. The frightful effects of the "Acquetta di Napoli," to which rumour had assigned the power of causing death at any determinate period, after weeks, months, or even years of atrophy and wasting agony, — this terrible fluid, tasteless, inodorous, colourless, — so facile in its administration, and so impossible to be detected, had been for half a century the dread of southern Europe. Once administered, there was no hope for the sufferer, except in a few antidotes, the secret of which appeared to rest with the poisoners alone. A certain indescribable change crept on; a nameless feeling of indisposition, as the powers of life gradually sank beneath the influence of its venom, but one that offered no clue whereby the most perceptive physician could ascertain the seat of evil, or the principal organ affected. Then came anxiety and weariness; the spirits broke down, hope departed, and a constant gnawing pain, that appeared to run in liquid torment through all the arteries of the body, passing even by the capillaries, to bring fresh pain and poisoned vital fluid to the heart, left the helpless victim without ease or slumber; and, as time advanced in misery and anguish that evaded every remedy, so did the poison fasten itself deeper and deadlier on the system, until the last stage of its effects arrived, and life departed in a manner too horrible to describe.

Respecting this fearful scourge little technical information that is left can be relied upon. It appears to have been a preparation of arsenic; and, if this be true, the ignorance of the age might have allowed the deadly metal

to pass undetected by analysis: but as, we have before stated, toxicology is now more certain in its researches after hidden poison, and in this deadly drug especially. The merest trace of it, in whatever form it may be administered, even to the eye of the vulgar affording no more attributes than pure water for analysis, can be reduced to its mineral state. The grave itself refuses to conceal the crime; and the poison has the remarkable property of embalming the body, as it were, and by its antiseptic virtue giving back the vital organs to the light of day, should exhumation be required, in such a state as to place all matter of detecting its presence beyond the slightest doubt, even in the quantity of the most minute atom.

It was about the shop of Maître Glazer the apothecary, in the Place Maubert, at the river boundary of the Quartier Latin, that the principal collection of gossipers clustered all day long. He had acquired some renown in Paris for compounding and vending antidotes to the dreaded poisons; and it was reported that his unhappy assistant, Panurge, as he was nicknamed by the acquaintances of the apothecary, — albeit his real name was Martin, — was the subject of all his experiments. Panurge was a tall, spare creature, whose skeleton appeared to be composed of nothing but large joints, and chiefly resembled his predecessor of the same name in being a wonderful coward, as well as boaster; and herein he closely assimilated in his nature to the Gascon scholar, Blacquart. And when the latter sometimes accompanied his master's son, Philippe Glazer, to the house, these two would outlie one another in a marvellous manner, until they had well-nigh quarrelled and fought, but for very cowardice.

On the evening subsequent to the events of the last chapter, Maître Glazer was holding forth to a crowd of anxious auditors, even until after dark; whilst his man was busied in distilling some water of rare merit in all diseases. His shop had never held a larger meeting. It was known by the sign "*Au Basilisk;*" and had the "effigies" of that fabulous serpent painted over the door, done from the book of Ambrose Paré, which formed his entire medical library.

"Look you, Maître Glazer," said a bystander; "though Exili be taken, we are none of us yet sure of our lives. For are there not devil's drinks of Italy that will kill at any certain and definite time?"

"Theophrastus thus answers that question," replied Glazer, giving his authority first, that his statement might have more weight. "Of poisons some more speedily perform their parts, others more slowly; yet you may find no such as will kill in set limits of time. And when one hath lingered long, then hath he been fed little by little, and so tenderly nursed, as it were, into his grave."

"I have felt ill long," said a portly bourgeois. "Pray heaven I am not fed with poison in such manner! How may I avoid it?"

"By ceasing to eat, Michel," replied Maître Glazer. "Yet there are other methods of killing, which no man may combat but with antidotes on their effects being known. Pope Clement, the seventh of that name, and uncle to the mother of one of our kings, was poisoned by the fume of a medicated torch carried before him, and died thereof; and Mathiolus tells us, that there were two mountebanks in the market-place of Sienna, the one of which, but smelling to a poisoned gillyflower given him by the other, presently fell down dead."

"And a certain man, not long ago," said Panurge, "when he had put his nose and smelled a little unto a pomander which was secretly poisoned, did presently swell so that he almost filled the room, and would have died, but I gave him an antidote. Then he shrunk rapidly, and went on his way healed."

There was an expression of disbelief amongst the crowd, and a young artisan laughed aloud derisively; at which Panurge inquired bravely "Who it was?"

But when the artisan said it was himself, the ire of Panurge relaxed; and he said, if it had been any one else, he should have taken up the affront warmly. And then, on a reproving sign from Maître Glazer, he continued his work.

The evening soon warned the last of the talkers home, after Maître Glazer had held forth for some time longer on

his favourite theme. When the latest idler had departed, Panurge closed the shop, and they retired into the small apartment behind for supper.

The shop was at the corner of the *porte-cochère* leading to the court-yard, and one window looked upon the passage, so that everybody who passed to the other apartments of the house could be seen. The meal was soon arranged by the *concierge* of the establishment — for Maître Glazer was a widower — and he sat down with his assistant to enjoy it.

"Has my boy come back?" asked the apothecary, as they took their places.

"I have not seen him," replied Panurge. "His neighbour Theria, the Brabantian, is at home though, for there is a light in his window high up."

"They are great friends of Philippe's," said Maître Glazer; "both Theria and his wife — a modest, well-favoured body."

"Mère Jobert says it is not his wife," replied the assistant; "but merely a grisette of the city. Oh, the corrupt state of Paris!"

"She is outwardly well-behaved, and of mild manners," returned the apothecary; "and we wish to know no further. There is more vice at court than in that *mansarde*, which is approved of by the world."

"Theria does not like her to see much of me," said Panurge, conceitedly smoothing three or four hairs that straggled about his chin, where his beard ought to have been.

"Why not — for fear you should frighten her?"

"Frighten her! by the mass, it is far otherwise," answered the assistant. "There are not many gallants in Paris who have been so favoured as myself, or can show such a leg."

He stretched out the bony limb, and was gazing at it in admiration, when the attention of the apothecary was drawn off from some sharp reply he was about to make to Panurge's vanity, by a hurried tap at the door — a side one leading into the court. The rhapsodies of Panurge were stopped short, and he rose to let in the supposed

patient — for there was small chance of its being any one else at that hour.

As he opened the door, a female entered hurriedly, and threw off a common cloak — one such as those worn in winter by the sisters of the hospitals. She was a young and handsome woman, in reality about thirty years of age, but her countenance bore an expression of girlish simplicity and freshness which rather belonged to nineteen. Her eyes were blue and lustrous; her hair, dark chestnut, arranged in curls, according to the fashion of the period, on each side of her white expansive forehead; and her parted lips, as she breathed rapidly from hurry or agitation, disclosed a row of teeth singularly perfect and beautiful. One might have looked long amidst the fair dames of Paris, to have found features similarly soft and confiding in their aspect; the nose, which was *retroussé*, alone giving an expression — but a very slight one — of coquetry. Her figure was under the middling size, delicate and perfect in its contour; and, but for the mantle which she had worn over her other handsome apparel, a spectator would have wondered at seeing one so gentle in the streets of Paris by herself after dark, and during one of the most licentious epochs of French history. As Maître Glazer recognised his visitor, he rose and saluted her respectfully, with a reverence due to her rank; for it was Marie-Marguerite d'Aubray, Marchioness of Brinvilliers.

"I am paying you a late visit to-night, Maître Glazer," she said laughingly; "it is lucky your assistant is here, or we might furnish scandal for our good city of Paris."

"Your reputation would be safe with so old a man as myself, madame," replied the apothecary; "even with your most bitter enemy. Is M. the marquis well?"

"Quite well, Maître Glazer, I thank you. As to my enemy, I hope I cannot reckon even one."

"Report is never idle now, madame; but you have little to dread; few have your enviable name."

The marchioness fixed her bright eyes on Glazer, as she bowed in reply to the old man's speech, allowing a smile of great sweetness to play over her fair face.

"Is you son Philippe at home?" she continued. "I

wished to inquire after some of our charges at the Hôtel Dieu."

"I was asking but just now. There is a light with his friend Theria."

"I will go over to his *étage*, and see," replied the lady. "We are old friends, you know; he will not mind my intrusion."

She gathered the cloak once more around her, and then, with another silvery laugh, nodded kindly to Glazer and Panurge, and tripped across the court, leaving the apothecary and his assistant to finish their meal.

"An excellent lady," said Glazer, as she left; "good and charitable. Would we had many more in Paris like her! And she has hard work, too, at the hospitals at present, as Philippe tells me; some evil demon seems to breathe a lingering sickness into her patients' frames the minute she takes them under her devoted care."

Panurge spoke but little, contenting himself with gradually clearing everything digestible that was upon the table; and at last the heavy curfew betokened to Maître Glazer that his usual hour of retiring for the night had arrived. The old man, preceded by his assistant with a lamp, made a careful survey of his establishment, putting out the remnant of fire in his laboratory; and Panurge prepared his couch, which was a species of berth under the counter. From their occupation they were both startled by a second knocking at the door, hurried and violent; and, on challenging the new comer, a voice without inquired, "if Philippe had come in?"

"My son seems in request to-night," said Glazer. "That should be the Chevalier de Sainte-Croix's voice."

"You are right, Maître," cried Gaudin without, for it was he. "Do not disturb yourself. Shall I find your son in his apartment?"

"I cannot say, monsieur. Madame Brinvilliers asked the same question but a few minutes since."

"She is here, then?" asked Sainte-Croix, with an eagerness that betokened the marchioness was chiefly concerned in his visit."

"She crossed the court just now, and has scarcely had time to return."

"Enough, Maître Glazer," replied Sainte-Croix. "I am sorry to have disturbed you. Good night!"

Without waiting for a return of the salutation, Gaudin left the door, and hurried along the archway, towards the staircase, evidently impelled by no ordinary excitement. He had called that evening upon Madame de Brinvilliers, at her hotel in the Rue des Cordeliers, to seek an interview with her upon the subject of her acquaintance made with Theria at the Jacobins, which since last evening had been rankling in his heart. For some of the busy tongues of Paris had long whispered of a *liaison* that passed the bounds of friendship, between Gaudin and the marchioness; nor were the reports unfounded. Sainte-Croix was madly, deeply devoted to her; but jealous at the same time, to a point which rendered every word or look that she bestowed upon another a source of raging torture to his mind. He found the marchioness had left word with her *femme-de-chambre* that she had gone to see Philippe Glazer respecting her hospital patients, whom she was accustomed to serve as a *sainte fille;* and knowing that Theria occupied the same flat with the young student, his suspicions were immediately aroused. She had, beyond doubt, made an appointment with him.

With his brain on fire he left the hotel, and rapidly threading the dark and wretched streets that led to the Place Maubert, rather by instinct than the slightest attention to the localities, he reached the *porte-cochère* by the side of Glazer's shop. Here he gained the information just alluded to, and immediately proceeded to the floor on which the rooms of the scholars were placed, flying up the stairs three or four at a time, until he came to the landing. There was no light in Glazer's chamber; he listened, and all was quiet; he was evidently not within. But from Theria's he thought he heard the murmur of voices proceeding, mingled now and then with light laughter which he recognised, whose sound made his blood boil again. He seized the handle of the *sonnette*, and pulled it violently. In less than half a minute, during which time he was chafing up and down the landing like an infuriated animal, the summons was answered. A small window in the wall

was opened, and a female face appeared at it—that of a young and tolerably good-looking woman, apparently belonging to the class of grisettes.

"Is Camille within?" asked Sainte-Croix, with an assumption of intimacy with Theria.

An answer was given in the negative.

"The Marchioness of Brinvilliers is here, I believe?" continued Gaudin; and, without waiting for a reply, he added, "Will you tell her she is wanted on most pressing business?"

The woman retired, and closed the window. Immediately afterwards, he heard footsteps approaching; the outer door opened, and Madame de Brinvilliers appeared.

A stifled scream of fear and surprise, yet sufficiently intense to show her emotion at the presence of Gaudin, broke from her lips as she recognised him. But, directly, she recovered her impassibility of features—that wonderful calmness and innocent expression which afterwards was so severely put to the proof without being shaken; and asked, with apparent unconcern,

"Well, monsieur, what do you want with me?"

"Marie!" exclaimed Gaudin; "let me ask your business *here*, at this hour, unattended; and in the apartment of a scholar of the Hôtel Dieu?"

"You are mad, Sainte-Croix," said the marchioness; "am I to be accountable to you for all my actions? M. Theria is not here, and I came to see his wife on my own affairs."

"Liar!" cried Gaudin, as he quivered with jealous rage, seizing the arm of the marchioness with a clutch of iron. "Theria is within, and you came to meet him only. You know that woman is not his wife; though many there be less constant. You would wean his love from her, and make him cast her upon the world, that you might be installed as his paramour. You see, I know all—in another moment she also shall be acquainted with everything."

Sainte-Croix had spoken much of this upon mere chance, but it proved to be correct. In an instant the accustomed firmness of the marchioness deserted her, and she fell

upon her knees at his feet, on the cold damp floor of the landing.

"In the name of mercy, leave this house, Gaudin!" she exclaimed hurriedly. "I have been very, very wrong. I confess I ought to have been more candid. But leave this house — on my bended knees I implore it. I will explain everything."

"I shall not stir, Marie," replied Sainte-Croix; and through all his excitement a sarcastic smile played upon his lip as he saw the trembling woman at his feet. "The tumult of this interview will reach your new favourite's ears; possibly the police of to-morrow will exhibit strange prisoners."

In an agony of terror the marchioness clung to Sainte-Croix, and again besought him to depart. But Gaudin saw, as she quailed before his determined aspect, that he had gained a temporary triumph over her haughty disposition; and he enjoyed her distress in proportion as it increased.

"Gaudin!" she cried; "pray, pray quit this place. I will do all that you may in future wish, so that you will but go away. I will be your abject slave; you shall spurn me, trample on me, crush me, if you choose; only leave the house."

"I am waiting for an interview with M. Theria," Sainte-Croix replied coldly.

"You will not depart!" exclaimed the marchioness, suddenly altering her tone, and springing up from her position of supplication. "Then but one resource is left."

"Where are you about to go?" asked Sainte-Croix, as she advanced towards the top of the flight of stairs.

"Hinder me not," returned Marie. "To the river!"

The Seine flowed but a few steps from the corner of the Place Maubert, and Sainte-Croix doubted not but that, in her desperation of fear and excitement, she would not hesitate to precipitate herself into it from the quay — at that time unguarded by wall or barrier of any kind. He seized her wrist as she was about to descend, and exclaimed hurriedly:

"Wherever you go, Marie, I go too; even to perdition!"

They flew down the winding stairs, scarcely knowing how they progressed, Sainte-Croix still keeping hold of his companion. In an instant they were at the bottom of the flight, and Gaudin's hand was glowing like a live coal from the rapid friction of the balusters, as they descended; but frenzied and insensible to the pain, he saw or thought of nothing, except the pale and terrified creature in his grasp. As they reached the end of their headlong and impetuous course, Marie could no longer bear up against the whirl of tumultuous passions that agitated her. The struggle had been too intense; her nerves gave way, and she sank, apparently lifeless, on the ground.

The interview between Sainte-Croix and Madame de Brinvilliers, hurried as it had been, was too violent for the sound of their altercation not to reach Theria's chambers; and the frenzied pair had scarcely reached the bottom of the stairs, when the student was following them, accompanied by the terrified grisette, who was bearing a light. He found Gaudin endeavouring to raise the fainting marchioness. She had struck her face, in falling, against a projecting portion of the staircase, and was bleeding therefrom; a circumstance which, in the hurry of the instant, Theria attributed to Sainte-Croix. A few hot and hurried words passed on either side, and the next instant their swords were drawn and crossed.

Sainte-Croix, it need scarcely be observed, was a practised swordsman. But he nearly found his match in Camille Theria. The students were, at that time, most expert in fencing; and Gaudin was somewhat hardly driven by the assaults of his antagonist, who, with more enthusiasm than science, pressed on him, following thrust after thrust so rapidly, that Sainte-Croix was compelled to act on the defensive alone for some seconds. At length the cool calculation of the soldier, unnerved as he had been by the events of the last few minutes, prevailed over the impetuous assaults of his adversary. He allowed Theria to spend his energy in a series of heated attacks, which he put aside with practised skill; until, watching his moment,

he made a lunge, and thrust his rapier completely through the fleshy part of the sword-arm of the student, whose weapon fell to the ground.

"I have it!" cried Camille, as he reeled back against the pillar of the staircase; and stretching out his left hand he caught hold of the hilt of Gaudin's sword, preventing him from drawing it back again, until, with singular nerve, he allowed the bright blade to be retracted through his quivering muscle.

"A peace, monsieur; I have it!" he continued, smiling, as he watched the trickling dark stream that followed its withdrawal. "But you have not crippled me beyond to-night. Glazer will tell you that the veins will soon close. Had it been a leaping artery, the case would have been different. Estelle, tie my arm round with your handkerchief."

The grisette, who had been frightened to death during the contest, was now supporting the still senseless marchioness. Gaudin knelt down and relieved her of her charge, and she immediately bound up Theria's wound as he had requested, and then, at his command, went back to the chambers up stairs; she evidently lived in complete submission to what he chose to order.

"So!" said Camille, "that is past. We have met again in an odd fashion, Captain de Sainte-Croix."

As he was speaking, Marie opened her eyes and looked around. But the instant she saw the two rivals, she shuddered convulsively, and again relapsed into insensibility.

"She is a clever actress," continued Camille, smiling; "they will tell you so at Versailles."

"We have each been duped," answered Gaudin, somewhat struck at the cool manner in which Theria appeared to take everything; "she has been playing a deep double game with us."

"She will play one no longer as far as I am concerned. You are welcome to all her affections; and I shall rank you as one of my best friends for your visit this evening."

"Let me ask one thing," said Gaudin. "For her sake this rencontre must be kept between ourselves."

"You may have my honour that it shall," answered Theria, "if you think such an article good security."

But, whatever might have been their intentions, they were not permitted to preserve the secrecy. For Glazer's man, Panurge, hearing the struggle in the court, had thought it by far the best plan to call in the guard instead of going himself to see what it was; and opening the window of the shop looking on to the street, had bawled so lustily that a detachment of the Guet Royal was soon summoned, and by his directions now entered the court-yard, upon the assurance that a woman was being murdered.

They advanced at once to the foot of the staircase, where Theria, Gaudin, and Marie were stationed; their bright cressets shedding a vivid light over every part of the interior. Some young men, who had come up with the guard, as they were returning from their orgies, pressed forward with curiosity to ascertain the cause of the tumult.

But from one of them a fearful cry of surprise was heard as he recognised the persons before him. Sainte-Croix raised his eyes, and found that he was standing face to face with Antoine, Marquis de Brinvilliers!

CHAPTER VII.

LOUISE GAUTHIER FALLS INTO THE HANDS OF LACHAUSSEE.

Whilst the good gossipers of Paris, on the morning after the arrest of Exili at the Pont Notre Dame, were every where discussing the events of the preceding evening the principal actors in the scene were quiet enough. On board the boat-mill every thing was tranquil. The morning sun was high up, sparkling upon the river, and glistening in the lofty casements let into the tall sloping roofs of the houses adjoining the Seine. The quays were again filled with busy crowds: the buz and bustle of the foot passengers and the rumbling of ignoble morning vehicles—for

the aristocratic quarters still slumbered—once more fell on the ear; and the mountebanks and charlatans of the Pont Neuf and Carrefour du Châtelet were arriving with their stalls and apparatus to prepare for another day's speculation upon the credulity of their customers.

Benoit Mousel was the first of the three inmates of the mill that was stirring; and he blessed himself as the clock of the Tour d'Horloge read him a lesson upon his sluggishness. But he had been late in bed. The Garde Bourgeois had remained some little time after the prisoner had been taken; and even when they went, taking their dead comrades with them, the excitement and alarm of the Languedocian and his wife were too great to allow them to think of retiring to rest. Nor could Benoit persuade himself, in spite of some comforting assurances from the guard, that he was altogether exculpated from the suspicion of being an accomplice of Exili. In the stormy night that followed, even until morning, there was not a tile or fragment blown down from the tottering houses on the Pont Notre Dame, upon the roof of the mill, which did not cause him to start and tremble, with the belief that a fresh party of the watch were coming to arrest him. Even his usual narcotic, the clicking of the water-wheel, failed to lull him, although aided by the gentle sway of the boat as it rocked in the current; and his couch of empty sacks never before appeared so uncomfortable.

His wife had shared her bed with her young guest, and was scarcely less watchful and terrified than her husband; for Bathilde had not been very long in Paris, and never cared to leave their little floating tenement but to go to the market, or on Sunday when she donned her best costume of Languedoc, and accompanied Benoit to some of the resorts of the holiday-keepers beyond the walls; so that the wild manners of the time and city were comparatively little known to her. Louise was the only one of the party who slept throughout the night. Worn, broken down, crushed in heart and spirits, she had almost mechanically allowed Bathilde to officiate as her serving-woman; and a faint smile which passed occasionally over her sad features, was

the only token by which the good-tempered *paysanne* knew that her assistance was appreciated.

"Pardieu!" said Benoit, as they assembled to their morning repast; "I like the sun a little better than the night; how the clouds growled at the angry wind! And how the wind chafed the lighters against the piles of the bridge! Did you ever hear such a devil's squeaking as they made! Ugh!"

Benoit shuddered at the mere recollection of the sounds that had rendered the night so fearful; and then directly afterwards attacked the large log of bread, and one of a store of small cheeses, in a manner that showed his mental disquietude had not in any way affected his appetite.

"Did you hear the rain, Benoit?" asked Bathilde.

"One must have had sorry ears not to have done so," he replied. "I only dozed once; and then I dreamt I was tied to a stake in the Place de Grêve with a painted paper cap on my head; and the executioner was lighting the faggots, when down came the rain and washed us all away. Just then the storm awoke me."

And he drowned the recalled terror in a horn of wine poured out from the rude earthen jug on the table.

"You have eaten nothing, *petite*," said Bathilde, as she took the hand of Louise in her own, and pressed it kindly. "I am afraid you do not like our city food."

"Indeed you are mistaken," returned Louise: "it is most excellent. But I cannot eat. And yet," she added, sadly, "I have tasted nothing for two days."

"It's a bad thing, sweetheart, not to eat," said Benoit, by way of commentary on his own proceedings. "When I was courting Bathilde, if I had not eaten and drunk a great deal I should have died. Love is a terrible thing for the appetite."

"We have no honey here, nor oil, like we have at Béziers," said Bathilde.

"Ay! Béziers!" continued Benoit, with a fond reminiscence. "How I used to eat the mulberries there! You know the mulberries at Béziers, Ma'amselle Louise? And the old image of Pierre Pepesuc, that we used to dress up once a year."

"And I made ribbons for his hat," said Bathilde; "because he kept the town by himself, against the English, in the Rue Françoise."

"And the orchards on the bank of the Orb, and the vineyards, and the farms all along the river," continued Benoit, warming up as he called to mind the principal features of his beautiful Languedoc.

But it produced no corresponding animation in the pale face of Louise. On the contrary, she bent down her head; and they saw the tears falling, although she was evidently endeavouring to conceal her anguish from her hospitable entertainers.

"I shall never see Languedoc again," she said sorrowfully, at length.

"Oh, yes, you will, *ma belle!*" said Benoit, cheeringly; "and so we shall all. When autumn arrives, and Jacques Mito will come and mind the mill, we will all start together. I can get a mule who will go the whole way, with easy stages."

"And we have been promised a *patache*," observed Bathilde.

"Ay—a *patache*. Mass! did you ever travel by a *patache*? They send you up to the sky every round the wheels make. 'Tis a fine method of seeing the country."

Bathilde laughed at her husband's explanation of the uncomfortable conveyance. But it was evident that the mention of Languedoc only brought back tearful recollections to Louise Gauthier. She shuddered, as the image of some bitter scene was called up by the allusion, and remained silent.

The day wore on. Several persons — neighbours from the bridge, and street acquaintances of Benoit — came in the course of the morning to gossip about the events of which the boat-mill had been the principal scene of action. Bathilde went to market on the quays, and while she was gone Louise busied herself in setting to rights the humble appointments of their ark. The good-hearted Languedocian himself appeared very little at ease with himself respecting the disposal of his time; and he was constantly speculating upon the chance of ever recovering a small sum

of money due to him from Exili for lodging and services. He had discarded his motley habit, which hung in a woe-begone and half ludicrous fashion against the wall; and was now attired in the simple costume of a *banlieue* peasant.

Twilight was again coming; and the little party were once more reassembled, whilst Bathilde was telling all sorts of wonderful stories of the marvels she had seen on the quays and carrefours, when a fresh visitor arrived at the boat-mill. He came alone in a small boat, similar to the one Sainte-Croix had used the preceding evening, and without announcing himself, entered the apartment with an easy, half-impudent air, which proved that he was on excellent terms with himself. Benoit and his wife received him with great respect, being somewhat overcome by his appearance; for he was gaily dressed, and assumed the air of a grand seigneur. Their visitor was in the little room lately occupied by Exili, which the kind-hearted couple had begged she would call her own so long as she chose to remain with them.

"*Salut!* good people," said the stranger on entering. "Do not let me incommode you. Is this the mill in which the poisoner Exili was captured last evening?"

"Y-e-s, monsieur," gasped Benoit, in very frightened accents, whilst he added inwardly, "It is all up with me! I shall be broken or burnt on the Grêve after all!"

There could be no doubt about it in his mind. The visitor was evidently charged with a commission to arrest him as one of the Italian's accomplices. Even Bathilde's fresh, rosy cheeks paled; chiefly, however, from beholding her husband's terror.

"My husband had nothing in the world to do with him, beyond watching his fires and selling his love-spells," said Bathilde eagerly. "He had not, indeed, monsieur. Maître Picard, the *chapelier* of the Rue St. Jacques, will give him his good word."

"He is one of the Garde Bourgeois of St. Marcel," said Benoit.

"And kept the keys of the Porte Bordelle before King Louis knocked it down," added his wife rapidly.

"And his wife owns half the mulberries at Béziers," ejaculated Benoit. "I worked for her father, monsieur: he would come up to speak for me; but he has been dead ten years."

"My honest couple," said the visitor; "you appear to be giving yourselves a great deal of unnecessary discomfort. I have very little business with either of you."

Benoit drew a good long breath of relief, and now for the first time hastened to get a seat for the stranger.

"Have you any one staying in the mill with you?" inquired the new comer.

"M. Exili was our only lodger," said Benoit, not choosing to speak of the girl.

"But there is a young woman here, I think," continued the other. "The same that was present at the capture, last evening."

"Merciful Virgin! she is not a poisoner!" exclaimed Benoit, who began to misgive everything and everybody.

"Reassure yourself," replied the other; "she certainly is not, if the person be the same. Her name is ——"

"Louise Gauthier?" replied Benoit, as the stranger hesitated.

"That is right. Will you tell her some one wishes to see her upon business of importance."

Bathilde ran towards the chamber to summon the young girl. She appeared immediately; but as soon as she saw who it was required her attendance, she shrank back, with an expression of alarm and dislike, as she exclaimed,

"M. Lachaussée here!"

"Yes, Ma'amselle Louise," returned Sainte-Croix's confidant, as he rose from his seat. "You do not give me a very hearty welcome. Come here."

He advanced towards her; but Louise uttered a slight cry, and retired in the direction of her chamber, appealing to Benoit for protection. The miller immediately seized a partizan, which had been left behind in the tumult of the preceding night, and put himself before the door.

"Look you, monsieur," he said; "I heard your name from her lips last night, under no very pleasant circumstances. I think you hold some situation at the Gobelins."

"Well?" returned Lachaussée coolly. "Well, my good fellow?"

"Well!" continued Benoit; "it is not well, and I am not a good fellow, — at least, I would rather not be, according to your opinion of one. Now take this hint, and don't be too pressing in your attentions."

"Pshaw! you are a fool!"

"Without doubt," said Benoit; "or rather I *was*. Yesterday it was part of my profession; to-day I am a bourgeois, if I please to call myself so. But fool or not, you shall not annoy that poor girl."

"When you have come to the end of your heroics, perhaps you will let me speak," said Lachaussée. "Mademoiselle Gauthier," he continued, addressing himself to Louise, "you had a hurried interview here last evening with M. de Sainte-Croix. I am the bearer of a message from him."

"An apology, I hope, for his brutality," again interrupted Benoit, gaining fresh courage every minute. And he was going on with an invective, when an appealing look from Louise restrained him, and he contented himself by performing feats of revenge in imagination, flourishing his halbert about, to the great terror of Bathilde, who had never seen her husband so furious.

"I know nothing of that to which this person alludes," continued Lachaussée to Louise. M. de Sainte-Croix desires to see you, mademoiselle."

"To see me!" exclaimed Louise in a tremor of excitement, not unmixed with joy. "Oh, M. Lachaussée! you are not trifling with me? Is this really true?"

"You may convince yourself within a quarter of an hour," replied the other. "I have a carriage waiting at the foot of the bridge. Possibly you may conceive the reason of my mission; of that I know nothing."

"Do you think that I ought to go," asked Louise timidly of her honest host. "And you will not say it is unkind, leaving you at this short notice? Oh! if you knew how I have prayed to see him but once more — to speak to him again, if it were but to exchange a single word, and then bid him farewell for ever."

"Unkind, sweetheart?" said Benoit, laying his rough hand upon her shoulder. "It would be greater unkindness in us to keep you here. Go, by all means; and recollect this is still your home, if you have need of one. I will not even say good bye. Shall I go with you?"

"There is no occasion for that," said Lachaussée. "There are too valets with the coach, who will see Mademoiselle safely back again, should she return. And here is something M. de Sainte-Croix desired me to offer to you, for your care of her."

He placed a purse in Benoit's hand as he spoke. The Languedocian looked at it for a few seconds, peeping into its contents like a bird; and then he shook his head, saying,

"A fiftieth part of this sum would more than repay us for what we have done. No, no—I would rather you had given me a few sous—though I did not want anything. Keep it for us, Mademoiselle Louise, until you come back."

This was Benoit's rough method of making over the money to his late guest. Louise took it, for she did not wish to annoy him by returning it.

Then—hoping, doubting, trembling—she embraced Bathilde, and accompanied Lachaussée to the water platform of the mill. Benoit lighted her into the boat, and remained waving his torch in adieu, until they touched the landing place of the Quai du Châtelet. And then, with a hasty adieu to his wife, he jumped into his own light craft, and followed the direction the others had taken.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CATACOMBS OF THE BIEVRE AND THEIR OCCUPANTS.

THERE was much depravity and reckless disregard of every moral and social ordinance to be found moving upon the surface of the city of Paris at this epoch; but there was

still more beneath it. The vast *carrières* that have undermined the city in so many directions, the chief of which are now known by the general name of "the catacombs," still existed; but they were not then, as now, appropriated to the storing of remnants of mortality collected from the overcharged cemetery of the Innocents and other places of interment. They had, however, living occupants—many, perchance, whose bones exhumed and transported in future times from these burial-grounds, now assist in forming the ghastly decorations of these subterranean charnel-houses.

As early as the commencement of the fourteenth century, it was the custom to dig the white freestone, of which the greater part of the edifices of ancient Paris were built, from *carrières* on either side of the Bièvre river, and beneath the Faubourg St. Marcel, in which neighbourhood much of our scene has passed. These undertakings were continued for two or three centuries, without method or direction, unrestrained by any authority, and entirely according to the will of the excavators; until they had not only hollowed out the ground, for an incredible distance under the faubourgs, but had even undermined the southern parts of the city, placing in great jeopardy the streets and buildings over them, as indeed they are said to be at present. The empty caverns, most of which opened to the air and light by unguarded pits and archways, at which accidents were constantly occurring, soon found inhabitants; and whenever the working of one of these *carrières* ceased, either from the fear of proceeding further, or the stoppage of the outlet by a tumbling in of the freestone, it was immediately taken possession of by the graceless wanderers and outcasts who formed the refuse of every grade and circle of society in the dissolute city.

A carriage was waiting, as Lachaussée had stated, at the side of the Seine; and when he had entered with his unsuspecting companion, it moved on towards the southern extremity of the city, in the direction Sainte-Croix had taken the preceding evening. Scarcely a word was spoken by either party, until the vehicle stopped beneath the sign of the "*Lanterne*," the low tavern in the Rue Mouffetard.

The light revealed its blackened beams, and the rough, crumbling pillars that supported the upper floor.

"This is the end of our journey, mademoiselle," said Lachaussée; "we must descend now."

"But this is not the residence of M. de Sainte-Croix," observed Louise, as she cast a misgiving glance at the worn and ancient tenement.

"We shall meet him by appointment," replied the other, as he got down; "and he is certain not to be much after his time. If he has not arrived, do not be alarmed; I have received his orders to take the greatest care of you."

The manner of Lachaussée towards Louise was so completely changed since they last met, his usual insolence had turned to so respectful a bearing, that her suspicions were for a time lulled. "He is evidently trying," she thought, "to efface my recollections of his importunities."

They were admitted by the host, and Lachaussée inquired if Gaudin had arrived. The man answered in the affirmative, and moreover stated that he had gone to his laboratory, leaving word that, if any one inquired for him, especially two who answered to the description of the present visitors, they were to be admitted to him.

He threw back a heavy door in the corner of the room, as he spoke, and placed himself at the entrance with a light. It opened apparently on the brink of a dark well; at all events, there was no passage leading from it. In her anxiety to meet Sainte-Croix once more, Louise had stepped forward before her conductor; but as she saw the deep abyss that yawned immediately at her feet, she started with a cry of affright.

"Do not alarm yourself, mademoiselle," said Lachaussée; "Monsieur is a subtle chemist, and pursues his studies below. Let me go first."

Lachaussée took the light from the host, and grasping the hand of Louise, almost dragged her towards the doorway, for she hung back from terror. The light revealed a few rude wooden steps, down which they passed; and then she found herself, with her guide, in a narrow excava-

tion, scarcely large enough to contain them both, and hewn in the solid limestone.

A straightened passage led from this hollow, upon a rapid descent. The walls were roughly fashioned, as well as the roof, from which large blocks depended, which threatened every instant to tumble down and crush those below. At the sides the stone was dirty and smoothed, as if from the frequent contact of passers by; but above, it was white, and scintillated in places from the reflection of the light which Lachaussée carried. They went rapidly on, still going down, down, until the arched-way became damp, and in some places small streams of water trickled through the walls, or mixed with the lime and depended in stalactites from the projecting pieces. Then other caverns branched out from the track they were following, and were soon lost in the obscurity. Shells and marine fossils, so bright that they almost appeared metallic, were everywhere visible; and occasionally the petrified traces of monsters of a former world started out from the rude boundaries of the passage. The air became chill and damp; the breath of the intruders steamed in the flaring light of the torch; and their footsteps fell without an echo, clogged by the deadened and imprisoned atmosphere. Louise spoke not a word; but even clung to Lachaussée in the fright of their dreary journey.

Before long the way became more lofty and spacious. Other tracks evidently branched into it from various points; and the paths were more beaten, but still always descending. Louise fancied she heard sounds too; now and then the echo of a laugh, as at a distance, or the roar of hasty altercation. She addressed several questions to Lachaussée, as to how much further they had to travel; but received no reply, beyond a common-place evasion. Then the sounds were louder and nearer; and at last the superintendent of the Gobelins pushed aside a curtain of coarse sackcloth that hung before a doorway, as if to deaden the noise within; and led Louise into an apartment about thirty feet square, roughly cut in the same manner as the archway, but in a soft chalky stone — that kind which, burnt and pulverised, is known so well in the arts.

There were many people, of both sexes, in this vault, and a glance sufficed to show that they were collected from the lowest dregs of those who lived from day to day they cared not how — in Paris. When any one of their usual haunts — "the Cour des Miracles," before alluded to, — became too prominent in its iniquities for the police to suffer it to remain unvisited, they sought a refuge in the "*carrières*" at the southern part of the city, beyond the barriers, out of the jurisdiction of the Guet Royal. The Garde Bourgeois they set entirely at defiance. Having once taken possession of their subterranean domain, approach was at all times dangerous, except to the initiated. The fruits of all the robberies committed in the faubourgs were stored in the gypsum vaults of St. Marcel: and these caverns also served to secrete those hapless people who had been carried off by force, and were either sent from there to America, to be sold, as they affirmed, having been kept "*en charte privée :*" or else they were disposed of to the officers who were on the look-out for recruits. Lachaussée's employments, whilst in the service of Sainte-Croix, were of this nature, and will in some measure account for his intimacy with the inhabitants of the *carrières*.

There was a rough table in this room, formed by planks laid upon blocks of gypsum. Seats of the same fashion were placed about, and settles were in some places cut from the limestone itself. Lamps were hung from the roof, burning dimly in the imprisoned air, and smoking the blackened pointed incrustation that depended around them in fanciful variety.

We have said that several persons, both male and female, were grouped about the room. Some were drinking, others quarrelling over and dividing their spoils, and many were sleeping off the fumes of intoxication. But there was one man striding about the room, to whom they all appeared to pay some deference, — such respect, at least, as could be exacted from the party. He was of enormous stature, and clad in the rudest manner, in garments apparently chosen from half-a-dozen different wardrobes. His hair hung matted and dishevelled about his head, and his arms were bare, of immense power, and scarred in all directions. One

eye was perfectly closed, the result of some violent attack; and the other glared unnaturally, from the absence of a portion of the upper eyelid. As Lachaussée lifted up the curtain he turned sharply round, but, recognising him, dropped immediately into his usual lounging position. This man was Bras d'Acier; the most celebrated brigand of the city.

"M. Lachaussée," he said, "enter. I thought Colbert had dared some of his bloodhounds to follow us. Whom have you there?"

"A friend of M. de Sainte-Croix," replied the intendant, with much significance. "He wishes her taken the greatest care of."

"She is welcome," replied Bras d'Acier. "His wishes shall be obeyed."

Louise uttered a scream as Bras d'Acier advanced towards her, and would have fled; but Lachaussée held her by the hand, and he pulled her into the vault. The women at the same time rose from their seats, and collected around, and in an instant had dispossessed her of a few ornaments of humble jewellery which she carried in her hair.

"M. Lachaussée," cried the terrified girl, "you have cruelly deceived me! Where is M. de Sainte-Croix?"

A loud laugh broke from those about her, as Bras d'Acier took her from the attendant, and pulled her under the lamp.

"M. de Sainte-Croix will be here directly; especially if he knows such a pretty face expects him. In the mean time you can bestow your favours as you please. Give me a kiss."

He attempted to draw her still closer towards him; but Louise, shuddering from his advances, freed herself from his hold, and crouched down at his feet.

"Is there no one to protect me?" she cried. "M. Lachaussée, you shall pay dearly for this treachery. Help! help! Gaudin! are you near me, or have I been so cruelly deceived?"

"Pshaw!" returned the ruffian, at whose feet she was crouching, as he liberated her wrists. "I never give myself much trouble in these matters; too many women are

too eager to court me. There—get up: you will know better after you have lived with us a little time."

"What do you mean?" asked the terrified girl. "You do not intend to keep me here?"

"I am sorry, if it displeases you, to say we cannot let you go," answered Lachaussée, entirely altering his tone.

"What is the meaning of all this? For the love of heaven, tell me for what you have brought me hither!"

"To take care of you—that is all," said Lachaussée. "Paris is a dangerous place for youth and beauty like yours; besides, you will find companions to cheer your solitude."

Louise looked round, and shuddered at the unpromising countenances about her. Some were laughing, others gazing in stupid curiosity; but none seemed to sympathise with her. She covered her face with her hands, to shut them from her sight. One of the women, an amazonian creature, who was near her, pulled them away, as she said:—

"We have an altar if you wish to pray: you will find nothing omitted in our *cour souterrain*. Only do not hide your face, for you will be married to-morrow; and it is right your future husband should see something of you."

Louise was too frightened to reply. She looked wildly about her, and drew back trembling to Lachaussée; loathing him, yet he appeared the most human of this fearful company. The woman who had addressed her pointed to the altar she had spoken of. It was indeed there, at the end of the room, cut out from the gypsum, and surrounded by a few rough ornaments of the same material.

"Why not marry her at once?" continued the woman; "Jerôme Barbier has no wife. *A la noce! à la noce!*"

"*A la noce!*" chorussed all the others.

"Look here, ma'amselle," cried the amazon, leading a man forward. "Is he not a proper bridegroom? Will you have him? We have the *cruche* ready to be broken."

The man advanced, and was about to offer some rude salutation, when Louise darted from the side of Lachaussée, and, hurrying along the vault, threw herself upon the highest step of the altar, clasping the crucifix that surmounted it with her hands. No one had time to arrest her progress; the movement had been too sudden.

"*Asile!*" she cried. "A sanctuary! If you have any respect for this holy sign, and it is not set up here in mockery, I claim it. I throw myself on the protection of the cross!"

Superstition, rather than religion, had a powerful hold upon these lawless people. Even Bras d'Acier was silent, and the remainder appeared indecisive how to act.

But the duration of this silence was but short. Whilst the ruffians and their associates were yet doubting what course they should pursue, they were startled by a dull, heavy knocking, repeated at slow intervals, and sounding in the immediate vicinity of the cross, to which Louise was clinging. It was first observed by Bras d'Acier, and he called the attention of Lachaussée to it, as a small piece of limestone, unsettled by the concussion, fell upon the rough floor of the vault. Louise, too, heard the noise; and, seeing that it appeared to alarm her prosecutors, redoubled her cries.

"Silence, woman!" cried Bras d'Acier, although in a subdued voice, as the deadened blows still kept on. "Silence, I tell you; if you think your life worth keeping."

"Knock her on the head," said one of the ruffians.

"Drag her from the cross," exclaimed the woman who had before spoken. "I will do it myself, if you are all so terror-stricken."

"Hold!" shouted a third, as he raised his hand in an attitude of denunciation. It was the broken down abbé, whom Lachaussée had before met with the students. "Such violation must not be. The crumbling walls would fall and crush you all beneath their ruins did you invade the sanctity of that altar. Back — and respect this holy emblem."

Degraded as Camus was, there was something in his manner and attitude that awed the group about him. They had advanced at the instigation of the woman, but now once more fell back.

The noise still continued, but it came nearer and nearer; and now the sound of a voice could be heard shouting, but in the distance.

"It is a fresh scheme of Colbert's hounds," said Bras

d'Acier. "They know every vault and underground alley in Paris as well as the rats. To the Carrière Montrouge with ye all! I will dispose of this squeaking girl myself, though heaven and hell forbid it."

His companions immediately took the hint. They hastily collected their things together; hiding some of them in niches and corners of the quarry, and then fled through the different archways in the direction indicated by Bras d'Acier; whilst the robber himself remained in the *carrière*, together with Lachaussée.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REVENGE OF SAINTE-CROIX. THE RENCONTRE IN THE BASTILLE.

We left the Marchioness of Brinvilliers at the moment when her husband, in company with the Guet Royal, entered the court-yard where she was lying in real or well-feigned insensibility, Sainte-Croix by her side, his drawn sword in his hand, and Camille Theria, a silent observer of the group, leaning with folded arms against one of the pillars of the door-way.

At the sudden exclamation of the marquis, Sainte-Croix had started from his stooping position, and for a moment all was silence and expectation. Gaudin was a bold and ready-witted man; but the rage, jealousy, and hate that worked within him, almost over-mastered even his well-practised invention. For an instant he thought of declaring his guilty passion for Marie, although at the risk of involving himself in her ruin; for he knew the hasty and vindictive temper of Brinvilliers. But this passed away, and with one great effort he turned calmly to Theria.

"Now, sir," said he; "you will believe the assurance of this lady's husband, that she is not what you took her for."

The quick glance of intelligence that passed between them showed how well Theria understood the game Sainte-

Croix was playing. Advancing to the marquis, with a respectful bow, he tendered, in set phrase, his humble apology for having, in mistake, insulted "Madame la Marquise." He had an appointment on the spot, he declared; and the cloak which the marchioness wore, together with the darkness of the night, had prevented his discovering that she was not the person he had expected, until her cries had brought in Sainte-Croix, who was passing, as he said himself, to his lodgings in the Rue des Bernardines, hard by the Place Maubert.

Whether fully satisfied with this explanation or not, the Marquis of Brinvilliers was too much a *coureur des rues* himself to scan too closely the equivocal position in which he had found his wife. She accounted very naturally for her presence by her connection with Glazer, the apothecary, who furnished the medicines for her patients in the Hôtel Dieu. The guard retired on finding that no more disturbance was to be apprehended; and Panurge, having summoned a *voiture de place*, Antoine took a friendly leave of Sainte-Croix, thanking him for his interposition, handed in the marchioness, and they drove rapidly off in the direction of the Pont Notre Dame.

"Adieu, Monsieur de Saint-Croix, or *au revoir*, if you will," said Theria, when they were left once more alone together. "The poor marquis wears his horns with a grace that belongs exclusively to the court of our *Grand Monarque*. It would be a pity to rob him of so becoming an ornament."

Gaudin scarcely knew what answer to make. Nor indeed did Theria permit any, as he continued:

"For myself I renounce all pretensions, and leave the field to you. The poor student is no rival for the gallant captain of the Regiment de Tracy."

And with a smile that had in it more of mockery than mirth, he rapidly remounted the stairs, without waiting for a reply.

Sainte-Croix offered none. It was only by the clenched teeth and quivering play of his brow that his thoughts could have been read, as he strode with a hasty step along the St. Victor to his own lodgings. He was one of those

natures that take their tone from the accidental circumstances around them. He might have been a military hero, an enthusiastic priest, a successful politician. The illegitimacy of his birth, and the colour of the times, had made him an adventurer, a gambler, a criminal. His love for Marie de Brinvilliers had been passionate and intense, as it can be only in natures like his own. Now that the current of it had been forced back upon his heart, it seemed changed to a deep, deadly, withering hate.

"I will be her bane — her curse!" he exclaimed, as he paced up and down the apartment, after flinging his hat and cloak aside. "I will be her bad angel. She shall be mine — yes, body and soul — in life and after it! And I will triumph over that besotted fool, her husband. Come, my power — my talisman!"

With a short, dry laugh, he stopped before a massive bureau which stood, surmounted by a narrow mirror, between the windows of the room. And, taking up a small iron-clamped box, he opened it, and brought from it a small packet carefully sealed, and a vial of clear colourless fluid.

"Come," he continued. "The fools who envy me — the bastard-captain — my fortune, have said I had discovered the philosopher's stone. I have it — it is here: the source, not of life, but death!"

He held the packet in his hand a moment; and then returning it to its place in the casket, resumed his hasty walk, and broken exclamations of passion, strangely mixed with triumph.

An hour had passed away, when, La Prairie, one of his servants, entering the room, announced Françoise Rousset, femme de chambre to the Marchioness de Brinvilliers. The girl entered with a look of terror that contrasted strangely with her lively and good-humoured face; and handing a note to Sainte-Croix with much the same air which a child would put on in presenting a cake to an elephant, timidly waited his answer.

"Tell Madame la Marquise that I will attend to her," said Sainte-Croix, as he hastily ran over the contents of the note.

The girl curtsied, and left the room with more precipitation than grace. For Sainte-Croix was said to deal in strange and forbidden arts; and the same tastes which among the rich had won for him the reputation of a successful alchemist, had established for him also, amongst the vulgar, a character for intimacy with Satan and his imps, which his dark and lowering manner, at the moment Françoise entered, was well calculated to sustain.

"So," he exclaimed, slowly re-reading the letter, and dwelling on parts of it with a bitter emphasis, "you are determined not to outlive the night, and would have some of the subtle poison of which you have heard me speak. No, fair lady: we must not part so soon. Now begins *my* triumph!"

And with these words he resumed his hat and mantle; and leaving orders that Lachaussée, should he return, was to await him in the house, he entered a fiacre, and drove to the Hôtel d'Aubray, the residence of the marchioness, in the Rue Neuve St. Paul, not far from the Bastille.

His road lay across the Pont de la Tournelle, which connected the Ile St. Louis with the Quartier des Barnardins. The fiacre was lumbering along this route, when Gaudin was startled from his moody reflections by its sudden stoppage. Looking out to ascertain its cause, he saw that they were in the Rue des Deux Ponts, and his horses entangled with those belonging to another carriage, escorted by two armed laquais, whose altercation with the driver of the fiacre was not so loud but that, from the interior of the vehicle which they guarded, Sainte-Croix could hear a mingled sound of oaths, shrieks, and remonstrances, in a woman's voice. Gaudin would have heeded this little, had it not been for the stoppage, which, excited as he was, chafed him beyond his usual coolness. Springing out of the fiacre, he found himself, almost before he knew it, crossing swords with the two laquais, one of whom he slightly wounded; the other, hotly pressed, sheltered himself by running behind the carriage, calling loudly for help.

One of the carriage windows was now suddenly broken from within, and he could see that its occupants were struggling; the one for escape, the other to prevent it;

whilst the shouts of "*au secours!*" grew louder and louder. Sainte-Croix abandoned his pursuit of the servant, and was proceeding to open the door of the carriage, when it was suddenly forced from within, and a woman, young, beautiful, and richly dressed, half fell, half sprung, into his arms.

"Marrotte Dupré!"

"Gaudin de Sainte-Croix!"

The exclamations were uttered at the same instant.

"Save me, as you are a gentleman!" cried the girl; at the moment, she was seized by a person masked, who leapt after her into the street.

"*A moi!* monsieur," cried Sainte-Croix, still holding the girl, and presenting his drawn sword to her companion.

The male occupant of the carriage burst into a loud laugh, and pulling off his mask, discovered the features of the Marquis de Brinvilliers!

"Ventre St. Bleu, my friend! we are fated to odd rencontres," cried Brinvilliers. "You have begun the night by protecting my wife; you finish it by robbing me of a mistress."

"No, no!" cried the girl, an actress at the theatre in the Rue du Temple. "I am no mistress of his: it is against my will that I am here: he carried me off from my mother's. Save me, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix!"

"Pardon, Mademoiselle," returned Gaudin, sheathing his sword. "I cannot interfere in an affair of gallantry. *Au revoir*, Marquis, and success attend your wooing."

So saying he resigned the poor girl, who continued to shriek and implore his aid, in heart-rending entreaties, to the marquis. Kissing his hand, he remounted the fiacre, which was by this time disengaged. And each proceeded on his way; the husband to his amour, the gallant to his wife!

The Hotel d'Aubray, in which the Marchioness de Brinvilliers resided with her father, Monsieur Dreux d'Aubray, Lieutenant-civil of the city of Paris, was a massive building, as we have stated, in the Rue Neuve St. Paul, lately erected by Lemercier. The fiacre rolled under its arched gateway, incrusted with the cupids and wreaths

which characterised the ornamental architecture of the period, and stopped in the court-yard. Except on the *entresol*, where a light shone from the window of the marchioness's boudoir, the heavy square was dark and silent. Françoise was on the watch, and admitting Sainte-Croix by an *escalier dérobé* led him, with a light step, to a door concealed by tapestry, where, knocking with three low raps, she left him. The door opened and Sainte-Croix, for the second time that night, stood face to face with the Marchioness de Brinvilliers.

It was a low but spacious room. Heavy curtains of rich dark damask almost hid the two windows. The floor was covered with a soft Persian carpet—a luxury then unusual in Paris; and the air was heavy with the perfume that wreathed in thin blue smoke from a silver *cassolette* on the carved marble mantelshelf, over which hung a full-length portrait of the marchioness, painted with all the elaborate finish of Mignard's pencil, but scarcely so lovely as the original on whom Sainte-Croix was gazing with a passion quite unaffected by the contempt he felt for her. On a table near the fire were piled rare fruits; and the reflection of the ruddy flame leapt and sparkled in the silver wine-flagons and tall-stemmed Venetian glasses.

On a settee beside the table sat Marie, in studied disarray. She might have been made up after one of Guido's Magdalens, so beautiful were her rounded shoulders — so dishevelled her light hair — so little of real grief in her swimming eye, and so much of voluptuous abandonment in the attitude of resignation she wore when Sainte-Croix entered the room.

He comprehended all the artifice in a moment; but there are states of feeling in which trickery, so far from inspiring disgust, is most acceptable. All truth and sincerity was at an end between them; and the only tie that yet held them together — that of passion — has a craving for such dexterity as the marchioness had exhibited in the *mise en scène* of herself and boudoir. Without an effort to resist its influence, and with a voluntary yielding up, for the moment, of his scorn and bitterness, Sainte-Croix passed on to the couch, and sinking at his mistress's feet, felt her hands entwine his neck, and her long hair ming-

ling with his own, as her rosy mouth, pressed to his forehead, half-sighed, half-whispered, "Forgive!"

Not a word was spoken. A more perfect adept in all the arts of gallantry than Sainte-Croix never encountered a more passionate and more calculating woman than Marie de Brinvilliers.

"Gaudin!" said the marchioness, in a low, sweet voice, "You love me—still?"

"Ever—ever!" murmured Sainte-Croix. And so far as passion is love, he spoke truly at that moment.

"I cannot live without thee, Gaudin," continued Marie. "Antoine knows of our love. I saw it in his face to-night as we returned from the Place Maubert. He will kill thee, Gaudin; and, my father—" Marie shuddered with well-feigned terror.

"Has your husband seen M. d'Aubray to-night?" inquired Sainte-Croix.

"They were closeted together after our return," replied the marchioness.

Quick as thought, Sainte-Croix raised his head to the face of the marchioness; and, half-muttering to himself, said—

"You have not played me false again?" A shower of kisses was the only answer. Another pause ensued, broken by Sainte-Croix.

"Marie!" he said, "they must die, or our happiness is impossible."

"Who?" asked the marchioness eagerly.

"Your husband and your father."

With a hasty shriek, Marie flung her lover from her, and retreated as far as the couch would allow her, repeating, as if in a dream, "Die! my husband, and my father!"

"Ay," said Gaudin, uttering each word slowly and calmly, as if he would have had it sink into the heart and memory of her he was addressing. "Ay—die! if we are to give the rein to our attachment. I cannot brook the slow and secret arts of an intrigue with thee, Marie: my love must have full scope and open daylight. I repeat, your husband and father must be removed. Do you understand me?"

The marchioness returned no answer. Her hands were clasped over her eyes, and the hot tears trickled through her fingers, strained convulsively as if to shut out sight — sound — all sense whatever.

"I have the means," continued Gaudin: "safe, secure means, that defy detection. You know the medicines that I have given you from time to time for your patients at the Hôtel Dieu. How did they work?"

"Alas! alas!" screamed the marchioness, "I see it all: they were poisons! Oh, Gaudin! — lost — lost!" And she buried her face in the cushions, writhing like a serpent.

Not an emotion was traceable in the face of Sainte-Croix, as, with a steady hand, he took a small packet from his cloak, and slowly breaking the seals, shook a portion of its contents into one of the glasses near him — a tall goblet with a piece of antique money blown in its hollow stem — which he filled with wine. He then raised the marchioness from her crouching position, and, lifting the glass to his lips, said to her;

"Marie: in your letter to me this night, you asked for means of death. You are not of that clay from which a self-murderess is made. Let our love end. I will set you an example."

He made a motion as if to drink, but deliberately enough for the marchioness to seize his hand and arrest the progress of the goblet to his mouth.

"No! no!" she ejaculated, "I will be your tool, your slave, even until death!" Sainte-Croix placed the goblet on the table and clasped Marie in his arms, when suddenly a different door from that by which he had entered opened, and a tall, stately old man stood looking on the scene before him. Absorbed in each other they had not heard the door open, and it was not until his deep voice uttered the name of Marie, that the marchioness and Sainte-Croix perceived the intruder. It was Monsieur D'Aubray.

"My father!" shrieked the agonised woman, her eyes staring, and her lips apart. Sainte-Croix spoke not a word, but rose and bowed.

The old man returned the salutation, as ceremoniously

as if the scene were passing at the king's levée at Versailles.

"To your chamber," he said at length, addressing himself to Marie. Then, turning to Gaudin, he continued, "Monsieur de Sainte-Croix, I will provide you with a lodging where you will run no risk of compromising the honour of a noble family."

He drew from the pocket of his coat a folded paper. Sainte-Croix recognised the regal seal, and bowing, exclaimed:

"A *lettre de cachet*, I presume. For Vincennes?"

"Better, Monsieur le Capitaine," replied D'Aubray; "for the Bastille."

"I am too good a soldier to demur to any order of his majesty, however disagreeable," said Sainte-Croix. "As for my appearance here, I will not attempt to justify it."

"*Palsambleu!* you do well, sir," said the old man, his voice quivering with anger, "and I would recommend your example to Madame la Marquise, there, my daughter and—your paramour."

"Monsieur, *de grace!*" returned Gaudin, deprecatingly. "Your son-in-law will find me ready on my return from confinement to make him every amende he can ask as a gentleman. But be not unkind to your daughter: it is I alone who am to blame in this matter."

A grateful look from Marie rewarded Sainte-Croix for his apparent magnanimity; and even D'Aubray, much as he was moved, seemed struck with it; for, in a tone of less bitterness than before, he requested Sainte-Croix to attend him into the courtyard, where the archers were in waiting.

"Willingly," answered Gaudin. "But, monsieur, before I go, let me exchange a pledge with you; do not refuse me this one favour:" and, filling another glass, he offered to D'Aubray the one he had before poured out.

"To my speedy reformation," said he, as he raised his glass.

D'Aubray was on the point of drinking, when, with a shriek, the marchioness dashed the goblet from his hand, and it fell shivered on the floor.

"What means this?" said her father passionately. "Are you mad, madame?"

"Nay," interrupted Sainte-Croix. "Apparently, Madame la Marquise has no desire to see me a better or a sober man. Ah these women!" he added, in a half-aside tone to the marquis, and shrugging his shoulders. "*Allons*, monsieur!" then, as if suddenly recollecting something, he continued, "The staircase is guarded, I presume. You are too experienced a magistrate to neglect every precaution."

Monsieur D'Aubray bowed.

"Then, will you give me a moment alone with your daughter?" asked Sainte-Croix. "On my honour, I will not abuse it."

D'Aubray paused; but after a minute's thought, replied, "You have behaved better than I expected, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix. I grant your request." And so saying, he quitted the apartment.

As he left the boudoir, the marchioness gazed wildly and inquiringly at Gaudin, who, only whispering in her ear, —"Fool! you have thrown away a chance to-night that may never occur again,"— threw open the window of the *entresol*, and, after a careful look, continued, in a low tone, —"As I expected, the court is empty."

Then with a sign that checked the marchioness, who was apparently on the point of flinging her arms about his neck, he quickly stepped from the window, and, aided by the trellis-work and ornaments of the intercolumnar architecture of the Hôtel, descended easily and safely to the ground. A glance at the *porte cochère*, which was open, showed him a fiacre in waiting, with two *exempts*, who guarded the porch with their halberts. Wrapping his cloak round his left arm, and drawing his sword, with a spring he was under the shade of the archway almost before the sentinels' attention was awakened. Then, receiving on his cloaked arm the ill-directed blow of the one, he ran the other through the body, and, springing over him, was in the street before the alarm was given.

He sped along, and was turning the corner of the Rue Neuve St. Paul, when some one suddenly sprang from a doorway upon him, and then, being borne down by his

impetuous rush, still clung round his body, and effectually hampered his progress. With curses, he strove to free his sword-arm, and would soon have rid himself of his assailant, had not the archers, who were in chase, at that moment arrived to take their prisoner from the clutches of his captor, who was neither more nor less than Benoit, our friend the mountebank of the Carrefour du Châtelet, who, at the termination of an adventure to be hereafter explained, had tracked Sainte-Croix to the Hôtel d'Aubray, and remained crouched in a doorway of the Rue St. Paul until the arrival of the archers.

Sullenly Sainte-Croix resigned his sword to the officer in command, who attended him to the fiacre; and then, mounting beside him, they set off at a foot pace to the Bastille. During the short journey Sainte-Croix was silent; and, as the fiacre rolled over the drawbridge of the frowning fortress, which he had traversed under such different circumstances but the evening before, and along its barbican lined with low cabarets, wherein soldiers were gaming and drinking, to the inner gate, it would have been difficult to say which was the official, and which the prisoner. On their arrival at the lodge of the under-governor, a parley was held, which ended in that functionary expressing his regret to Monsieur de Sainte-Croix that he could not accommodate him with a separate apartment.

"Do not trouble yourself, monsieur," replied Sainte-Croix, with a forced laugh. "Provided my fellow-lodger is silent and cleanly, I had rather have his company than that of my own thoughts. I have no doubt we shall be long enough together to become excellent friends."

"If you do not object, then," answered the courtly deputy, "to another inmate, I have a chamber that will suit you exactly. Galouchet, conduct Monsieur de Sainte-Croix to Number Eleven in the Tour du Nord. I wish you a good night, sir."

With mutual inclinations, they separated, and Sainte-Croix followed the gaoler along the gloomy passages. His guide at length paused at a door numbered eleven, and, unlocking it, threw it open with a polite "*Par ici*, monsieur."

Gaudin entered. The room was not a *cachot*. It had a boarded floor and a tolerably large window, though heavily barred. There was nothing in its appearance, of those terrible underground dungeons, which, in the notions of the vulgar, formed the only places of confinement in the Bastille. It contains some rude furniture, and two truckle beds, one of which was occupied.

The gaoler set the light on the table; and, as he turned to depart, the unwonted glare roused the original tenant of the room. Starting up on his pallet, he disclosed to Sainte-Croix the livid face of the prisoner of the preceding evening, — the physician of the Carrefour du Châtelet.

It was Exili!

CHAPTER X.

WHAT FURTHER BEFEL LOUISE IN THE CATACOMBS OF THE BIEVRE.

As the last of the lawless band departed from the *carrière*, Lachaussée advanced towards the altar, at the foot of which Louise Gauthier had claimed a sanctuary. In spite of Bras d'Acier's last threat, the denunciation of the Abbé Camus had somewhat awed him. But Lachaussée was less scrupulous. He was as dead to all religious feeling as the others, and besides this, superstition had no power over him. Advancing to the cross, he seized the arm of Louise, and tore her from the altar into the middle of the apartment.

The knocking which had struck such terror into the hearts of the subterraneous gang still continued: and again Louise raised her voice for assistance.

"They will murder me!" she cried. "Help! this instant, or it will be too late. There are but two, and ——"

Lachaussée placed his hand over her mouth, and stopped her cries. And then, assisted by Bras d'Acier, he hurried her into a smaller *carrière* leading from the great one by a rude archway, which could be closed after a manner, like

the door, by a large curtain of rude sackcloth. It was a vault hewn out similarly to the other, with a rough attempt to form a Gothic roof and buttresses from the limestone. But there were horrid features in the apartment which made Louise shudder as she looked timidly round. A dull and smoking lamp was here also suspended from the ceiling; and by its light could be seen coffins in every direction round the walls: some with their feet projecting some inches beyond them; others lying sideways, such as we see bounding the grave of a crowded burying-ground. In many instances they were opened, but no remains were visible. Their cases appeared to have been appropriated to the use of cupboards, in which articles of various kinds were stored. In one corner were a few skulls and bones thrown carelessly together; the number was insignificant, and they were not ranged in the order of the existing catacombs. As we have stated, the *carrières* were at present the mere result of excavations for building-stone; it was not until more than a century after the date of our story that the health of the city demanded the removal of the foul and reeking burial-ground attached to the Eglise des Innocens, at the corner of the Rue St. Denis and the Rue aux Fers, near the present market, with whose beautiful fountain every visitor to Paris is familiar.*

In one corner of this ghastly chamber was a large font filled with water, which distilled drop by drop from the stalactites that overhung it, and the reflection of the lamp quivered on its dark surface. It ran over at one corner, and small channels hewn in the floor conveyed it away to *carrières* still deeper.

"Another word," said Lachaussée, "and we leave you to your own company in this dreary place."

"I ask no more," replied Louise, recoiling from him as he relaxed his hold. "Let me be any where, so long that I am alone, and away from those fearful people."

* The ill effects which the overcharged Cimetière des Innocens had upon the salubrity of Paris, situated as it was in its most crowded quarter, had been matter of complaint for *four hundred years*. Yet, such was the opposition of the ecclesiastical authorities, and the blind and superstitious obstinacy of the people generally, although the tainted air they breathed was thick with putrefaction and disease, that it was not until 1785 that the Council of State ordered its demolition. It was supposed, up to that time, that there had been one million two hundred thousand bodies forced into its comparatively narrow limits!

"I am sorry you do not like them," said Bras d'Acier; "the more so as you will perhaps have to pass a little time amongst us. Only it would not have answered to have taken you from the sanctuary before them. They are particular in matters of religion."

And he accompanied these last words with a horrid laugh.

"Do not take me among them again, M. Lachaussée," said Louise, "I implore you. Let me remain here rather, even in this dismal vault."

"Pshaw!" cried Lachaussée; "you know not where you are. Look at those coffins — they have long since been despoiled of the festering contents, to hold Bras d'Acier's riches. You are below the cemetery of St. Medard, hemmed in on all sides by corpses, the accumulation of centuries. Would you like this for a companion?"

He stooped to pick up a skull, and held it in mockery over the flame of the lamp, which hideously illuminated it. Then, tossing it back to the corner of the chamber, he went on: —

"The very air is redolent of mortality. The decay of ages, in some of the coffins, leaves but the food for that lamp which is now burning above us. Bras d'Acier is an economist; and many of the quiet inhabitants of the cemetery become more useful to mankind in death than they ever were in lifetime. They form his flambeaux."*

"Is there no one to aid me!" cried Louise in agony, and shrinking from the accumulated horrors of Lachaussée's description.

The dull knocking sound was again audible, but louder. It appeared to be close at hand, and the girl redoubled her outcry.

"Be still, I tell you," said Bras d'Acier, "and come instantly with us."

* *Adipocere* is the substance alluded to. Its name conveys its properties, and it was first made the subject of an interesting analysis by M. Thouret in 1784, upon the occasion of removing the burial-ground of the Innocents. It has always been found most abundant where the bodies have had the chance of being exposed to inundations of fresh-water, its formation being the result of some peculiar decomposition of the human frame hitherto unsatisfactorily accounted for. A piece is in the possession of the author.

"With you!" exclaimed Louise; "never; you shall kill me first. — Mother of Mercy! pity me; for to you alone can I now look for assistance."

She fell on her knees, and grasped a small crucifix that was suspended from her neck. Lachaussée snatched it from her, and threw it amidst the bones and rubbish in the corner.

"One moment's delay," he added, "and you are lost. Do you see that wall where the water is trickling and oozing into the font? It is not thicker than the length of your hand, and that is the only boundary between us and a branch of the cold Bièvre, which flows over our heads. We have but to confine you in this room, and let in the river; the *carrière* will be filled, and every record of the deed hidden. Come."

"Leave me here — drown me — if you know what mercy means," returned Louise, as she struggled with her persecutor. "How have I ever injured you, that you should persecute me thus terribly?"

"Your own sense might have warned you not to annoy M. de Sainte-Croix as you have done. But we have no time for words; you will have plenty of leisure in the Carrière Montrouge to learn everything. Bras d'Acier, you have broader shoulders than my own to carry a burden. Take up the squalling minx, and follow me. I will precede you with the light."

The huge ruffian advanced towards Louise Gauthier, who, despite their threats, shrieked with terror as he approached. He lifted her as he would have done an infant, whilst Lachaussée took down the lamp from where it hung, and prepared to go before him. Bur as they were leaving the vault, the noise sounded close at their side; the very walls appeared to quiver from some unseen blows; a few of the stalactites fell down with the vibration at their feet, and lastly the gypsum that formed the doorway was shivered into the chamber in large blocks, and a bar of iron, sharpened at one end, protruded, as though it came from the very bowels of the quarry. The concussion and the fall of the blocks brought down others with them; and one

large mass falling from the top of the archway completely closed the passage.

Bras d'Acier recoiled at the unexpected obstruction, and, throwing Louise off, raised a long heavy pistol fitted with a *snaphaunce*—a cheap modification of the wheel-lock, much used by the marauders of the period—and discharged it at the aperture whence the blocks had tumbled. The report caused a few more lumps to fall from the ceiling; and when the smoke cleared off, the upper part of a man's body appeared at the opening.

"If that is one of Colbert's blood-scenters, I have winged him," said Bras d'Acier.

"Not yet," said the stranger, smashing the wall on either side, and scrambling into the vault; "not yet, *mes braves*. Pheugh! I was obliged to knock a long time before you let me in!"

"Benoit!" cried Louise, as she recognised our friend of the boat-mill, and flew towards him. "What good angel brought you here?"

"No better one than yourself, *ma belle*," replied the Languedocian. "So," he continued, looking around him, and perfectly undismayed by the threatening looks of Bras d'Acier; "this is an odd place for gallant officers, like M. Gaudin, to give appointments at, or receive visitors."

"Where are your fellows," asked Lachaussée.

"Oh, I'm alone," replied Benoit. "What should I want with fellows?"

"To bury you if we blow your brains out," returned Bras d'Acier.

"Do it," said Benoit, drawing Louise towards him with one arm, whilst with the other he carelessly dug a bit of gypsum from the wall with his iron spike, and kicked it towards them. "Do it; and to-morrow my little wife, Bathilde, will go to the Prefet, with a note from me, ordering a search for Louise, and M. Lachaussée there, and telling him where there will be a chance of finding me."

"How came you here?" asked Lachaussée fiercely.

"Not by your route," said Benoit. "I know every turn of the quarries better than yourselves; I ought to do, for I worked in them when the stone was hewn for the

new works at the Gobelins. Do me the pleasure, ma'amselle, to scramble through this opening."

The last words were addressed to Louise, who remained close to her new protector during the hurried parley; but at his bidding prepared to climb over the *débris* of the gypsum into a passage beyond. Bras d'Acier made a movement to intercept her, but was restrained by Lachaussée.

"Your turn is yet to come," said the robber, grinding his teeth at Benoit.

"As you please, *mon maître;* only think twice about it first," answered the Languedocian, as he assisted Louise through the archway.

"You have checked us to-night," said Lachaussée; "it is the first time; but it is the last, and when we meet above ground, we will let you know it."

"*Sacré bleu!*" roared Bras d'Acier, rushing forward with a sudden impulse. "I can't lose our promised wages thus, come what may. Give up the girl."

As he flew at the broken archway, Benoit met him with a heavy blow from his weapon upon his head. To another man it would have caused instant death. Upon Bras d'Acier it had no other effect than making him reel back against Lachaussée, who was behind him.

"Fly, ma'amselle!" said Benoit,—"straight before you, towards that light at the end of the *souterrain*. I warned you," he continued, turning to the others. "You will find as strong arms in Languedoc as in Paris."

Bras d'Acier was for the minute stunned; he caught Lachaussée by the arm and leant upon him for support. Benoit took advantage of the circumstance to put the final *coup* to his enterprise.

"When we hunt out vermin," he said, "it is of no use unless we destroy their nest. Now, save yourselves as you like; but you shall not come near me."

He was already on the other side of the passage, when, scrambling forward, he stood once more on the broken masses of the quarry, brandishing his iron weapon. And then, with herculean force, he drove it against the side of the chamber which Lachaussée had pointed out as adjoin-

ing the Bièvre. Another and another blow succeeded, whilst a foaming stream followed the spike every time he withdrew it, until, weakened by the ruptures, an immense portion of the gypsum gave way, and, with the roar of a mighty cataract, an enormous body of water burst through the wall, carrying everything before it, as it rushed at once, leaping and chafing, to every part of the chamber.

As the irruption took place, Benoit leaped back to the aperture he had himself broken open. Lachaussée and Bras d'Acier, in the alarm of the moment, prepared to follow him, for the lashing water had already reached nearly unto their knees. But the force of the torrent drove them back, and as it rushed to the readiest and lowest outlet — that leading to the large vault — hurried them along with it, washing down all the barrier that had been made in the archway by the fallen blocks. By the lamp which still hung from the ceiling, Benoit saw them whirled through the narrow passage; and the next instant the water reached the level of the gallery wherein he stood.

"Now! now, sweatheart, make use of your legs, if ever you did!" he cried to Louise, who had remained close to him. "We must travel fast to outstrip it; but thank heaven, it is all up hill. Ah—lash away; we shall beat you yet."

He addressed the last words to some waves which dashed over the broken gypsum at his feet; for, in spite of the vast *carrières* into which it had burst, the water was rising rapidly, in consequence of the inequalities of their levels.

Then, seizing Louise, they fled rapidly hand in hand along the gallery, which was altogether a different one to that by which she had arrived, towards the end of it, where he had taken the precaution to leave a light, chased by the furious stream that was hurrying with a noise like thunder after them, coupled with the crashing and falling of the blocks of limestone, which continually broke down before its resistless force.

Fast and faster they sped through the labyrinth of vaults—now crouching along a rough and narrow passage,

and now flying over the hard floor of a large vault, or scrambling across an *éboulement* of the gypsum. And louder came the roar of the water, as it seemed animated in the pursuit by a spirit of life. With the courage which despair gives to the weakest, Louise kept up with and sometimes outstripped her companion, who cheered her as he best could; and whilst he threaded the intricate way with a readiness that showed his perfect familiarity with the *carrières*, promised her a safe asylum when they left them.

At last they emerged; not, however, into the pure air, but the damp and dim obscurity of a vault under one of the questionable dwellings in the Rue d'Enfer. This street was then inhabited almost entirely by the low and criminal population which French statists have named "*les classes dangereuses.*"

Louise knelt in the vault and prayed. Benoit, after a moment's pause, reverently crossed himself and knelt by her.

"*Eh bien, ma'amselle!*" said he, when his devotions were finished, although still out of breath. "Here is the worst part of our journey over. Still——"

And Benoit paused and scratched his head violently.

"Run into no further danger on my account, good friend," said Louise, guessing at once the cause of his embarrassment. "It is enough that I have escaped the fearful danger of those caverns. Leave me now: I will find some shelter and employment. A convent——"

"The religieuses do not look upon young women exactly as god-sends, unless their pockets happen to be better garnished than I take yours to be, *ma colombe*," said Benoit. "I would take you back to the boat-mill, and welcome, but that would be the first place to which they would come to find you. Now I have a friend—Lord forgive me for abusing the word!—an acquaintance hereabouts, where you would be safe enough from M. Lachaussée and his band; if they are not settled by the Bièvre long before this. *Mais*——"

And Benoit shrugged his shoulders in most eloquent bewilderment.

"Who and what is your acquaintance?" said Louise.

"Why, he calls himself a '*professeur*,' ma'amselle," replied Benoit; "but what he is just now is not quite so easily told. I have known him already in the last half-dozen years as juggler, Bohemian, bravo, cattle-doctor, rope-dancer, archer, — ay, and courtier too. But courage! It is but a trial."

Louise paused, and Benoit proceeded towards the outlet of the vault or cellar in which they stood, looked back to his pale charge when he reached the stairs. The appeal of his honest open face was irresistible, and Louise followed him. They ascended and found themselves in a rude corridor. The filth and damp of years was thick and clammy on the walls: and the dim light that struggled through the narrow windows, scattered at random up and down, showed long passages that branched from the *palier* where they stood, lined with doors on either side. Benoit, after looking about him for a moment as if to recall his memory of the localities, struck down the one which faced them.

They paused at the third door. Benoit raised his hand to knock, when the sound of a woman's voice within arrested it. Louise held her breath and listened earnestly. Benoit turned and looked at her, as she motioned with her hand that they should return towards the point from whence they had come. But her guide shook his head, and, with a sort of desperate grin, knocked loudly with the iron bar he still held in his hand. The sounds within ceased, and a heavy step approached the entrance. Benoit repeated his assault on the door.

"Who knocks?" said a shrill voice.

"Tsa tshen pal!" * was Benoit's reply.

The tongue in which he spoke was unintelligible to Louise, but the words seemed to reassure the occupant of the room, who at once proceeded to withdraw two heavy bolts, and gave admittance to Benoit and his companion.

The person who opened the door now stood before them. He was a slender well-proportioned man, in a

* "How are you, brother?" This is true Gitano, or Gipsy language. Wherever it is used, the reader may be assured of its anthenticity.

close-fitting doublet and *chausses* of black serge. The sharp and angular features, the saffron complexion, and large filmy black eye, showed the real gipsy blood. He looked at Louise with a strange fixed stare; but it was impossible to read anything in the gaze, either of astonishment or alarm.

"Who is she?" he asked shortly of Benoit, in the gipsy tongue.

"A sister of mine," replied the Languedocian. "She needs shelter and concealment for a while."

"She cannot have them here," was the answer.

"By the *morro** and the *lon*† she must," said Benoit calmly.

The man pointed to an inner door, and said,

"There is a *ranee*‡ there already confided to my safe keeping. What does your sister fear, that she comes here for safety?"

"The pursuit of a grand seigneur of the court, who has taken a fancy to her, and be hanged to him!" said Benoit. "Come, it will be but for a day or two — perhaps for an hour. Remember we are brothers, and the law of the Rommany binds you to help me."

"True," said the gipsy. He advanced towards her, and, addressing her in French, told her she could remain where she was so long as it suited her convenience, but on one condition.

"Name it," said Louise.

"To pay no heed to what does not concern you," returned the other. "I will give you a companion, who, if she amuses you as she has entertained me, will make the time pass pleasantly enough."

So saying, he opened the door leading to an inner room, and beckoned her to follow.

From the squalor of the outer apartment, Louise Gauthier was little prepared for the scene which presented itself. The room into which they passed was small, but furnished with a richness and elegance that would have fitted a royal boudoir. The walls were painted with

* Bread. † Salt. ‡ A lady.

flowers, and Cupids sporting amidst them. Rich curtains of damask almost covered the single window. Pile of cushions, fauteuils of velvet and ormolu, costly tables, and a marble chimney-piece, with its gay pendule, almost dazzled poor Louise; and it was not until she had taken a rapid inventory of all these, that she found the room contained an inmate. A young girl, richly dressed, was half sitting, half lying on a divan, in the darkest corner. It was Marotte Dupré — the actress who had vainly implored Sainte-Croix, but a short time previously, to rescue her from the Marquis de Brinvilliers. But she had apparently become reconciled to her abduction, or feigned to be so, for, starting gaily to her feet, and springing forward, with a merry laugh, she exclaimed,

"Welcome, *mon preux gardien!* You have brought me a companion of my own sex, to keep me company until the marquis returns from the Tuileries. Did you think I wanted one whilst you were here?"

And she threw a witching glance from her dark eye upon the Gitano, who, taking her hand, kissed it passionately.

"She is a young girl, sister to a friend of mine," returned the man; "who seeks an asylum here for a time."

"We welcome her to our court," said the actress, with mock dignity, extending her hand to Louise. "Sit by us, and tell us of your wishes, hopes, sorrows, — every thing about you, in fact. And you, my cavalier, dismiss that gentleman with the round face, who is gaping over your shoulder. We would bezalonè with our new friend."

The gipsy, thus addressed, turned to Benoit, and a rapid conversation in the dialect of his tribe ensued between them. When it was over, Benoit took Louise aside, and saying, "I will find a safer place for you than this, — fear nothing, I will return soon," left the room, in company with the Bohemian.

"Who is the other lady?" asked Benoit as they quitted the apartment.

"I don't know, nor do I much care," replied the man. "She was brought here by the Marquis de Brinvilliers,

who was sent for to the Tuileries almost the instant he arrived."

"Is she here against her will, then?"

"Mass! I don't know what to make of it. It seems that the marquis was nearly being set upon, in mistake, by his friend, Captain de Sainte-Croix, for carrying her off."

A hurried expiration escaped Benoit's lips.

"Whereabouts?" he asked eagerly.

"Between the Captain's lodgings and the Hotel d'Aubray, you may be sure," was the reply.

Benoit heard no more; but hurriedly bidding his acquaintance farewell, left the house. How he succeeded in his enterprise has been already explained.

As the door of the room closed, the manner of Marotte Dupré entirely changed. Hastily and breathlessly drawing Louise to the window, she whispered,

"I am kept here by force and treachery. The gipsy is a creature of the Marquis de Brinvilliers, who has carried me from the theatre. He is absent for a while; and I am trying the force of my fascinations upon my gaoler, the more readily to compass the means of escape. From whom do you seek asylum here?"

"I know not," said poor Louise, "who is my enemy. I do not believe that Gaudin would ever —"

She was interrupted by Marotte. "Gaudin de Sainte-Croix?"

Louise assented.

"Fear the worst," said her companion. If Sainte-Croix is your *friend*," and she laid an ironical expression on the word, "you are indeed deserving of pity."

Louise was about to speak, when a clamour in the street below attracted their attention. Marotte uttered a cry of joy; and, pointing down the Rue d'Enfer, of which the window commanded a view, cried,

"Look! look! — we are saved — we are saved!"

Louise followed the direction of her finger, and saw a heavy and magnificently decorated carriage, which with its attendant *laquais* had just drawn up at the miserable door of a house exactly opposite to the one in which they were.

A beautiful young woman, in rich costume, descended from it, and entered the house. Marotte Dupré, with clasped hands, followed her movements with intense anxiety.

"There is not a moment to lose. *O mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed, as she hastily drew some writing-tablets from her bosom, and, tearing out a leaf, wrote a few lines upon it with marvellous rapidity. "Now — now!" she continued, rolling it up into a ball. "Open the window!"

"Alas!" returned Louise, as she tried the hasp of the heavy casement: "it is secured. I cannot unfasten it."

"I have it!" cried Marotte, whilst a sudden inspiration lighted her pale features: "my ring will open the glass."

And, drawing a diamond ring from her finger — the rich gift of some *habitué* of the Théâtre du Temple, — she drew it around the pane, and then with a gentle pressure forced the glass to yield without. Had they broken it, the sound would have alarmed the gitano in the outer room.

Their chamber was on the *entresol:* the street was narrow, and the lacquey of the carriage was nearly on a level with them. Marotte passed her white arm carefully through the opening, and threw the writing towards the lacquey, accompanying the action by a low "Hist!" But it was not heard; and the little note, falling short of its aim, lay in the mud of the street, yet still perceptible in the gleam of the lamps on the carriage.

He was on the point of driving away, when a slight call from Marotte attracted his attention. With some little difficulty he at last perceived the note on the ground, and got down to seize it. Its contents seemed to surprise him; for, after reading it, he passed into the house which the lady had just entered. Marotte followed his movements with feverish anxiety, and Louise caught the infection.

"Who is that lady?" she asked: "and what was the import of your note!"

"It is Madame Scarron," returned Marotte: "the widow of my best friend. She is now in high favour at the court. Oh! she is so good — so kind. I wrote to implore her assistance to deliver us from this house; and she will do it."

At this moment the gitano returned. Marotte, with the skill of her calling, rose to receive him. All trace of

anxiety had disappeared from her face, and she was radiant with smiles. Advancing to the man, she exclaimed,

"*Bien*, my gallant protector! You will not leave us to ourselves, then?"

The gipsy's dull eye dilated, and the large pupil flashed with a strange light as he looked at the beautiful woman before him.

"I cannot stay without, and know that you are here," he replied. "I love to hear you speak, and to look at you."

Louise shuddered at the tone in which he spoke. Marotte had risen; and, while she stood half-turned from the window, threw a rapid glance into the street. The next moment she seized a mandoline that lay on a console of marble, and burst into a gay and jovial song, keeping time to the measure with graceful and wild movements. The gipsy listened with wide open eyes, and lips apart. He had no sight nor ears but for his bewitching prisoner and her song. Louise comprehended Marotte's object. It was to cover the noise of footsteps and voices on the staircase.

As she expected, a knock sounded at the door of the outer room. The gipsy, with a half-spoken curse, turned his head in the direction of the interruption, but did not stir from the spot as Marotte finished her song.

"It is Benoit returned," said Louise.

"I hope it may be," said the gipsy. "I best like mademoiselle here to be alone." And he left the room, without closing the door.

Louise's remark was made in so natural a tone, that no suspicion entered his mind. He did not even pause to ask who knocked, but ushered in the stranger at once.

The tall and beautiful lady whom Louise had seen step from the carriage entered the apartment, followed by four stout and well-armed *laquais*.

The gipsy, with the quickness of his tribe, saw his error; but it was too late to repair it. Marotte and Louise, who had watched with intense eagerness the opening of the door, rushed from the inner room; and the former, throwing herself at the feet of Madame de Maintenon (for Madame Scarron had lately received the lands and title of Maintenon from the King) seized her hands, and kissing

them, poured forth mingled thanks and prayers. With that winning and grave gentleness which belonged to her, the lady calmed her, and addressing herself to Louise, said,

"Marotte's note tells me you too are in danger, and need a friend and a refuge. Come with me, both of you."

The gitano saw that resistance was useless. The *laquais* clutched their long batons in a style that showed it would take but little pressure to make them use them. With all the suppleness of a true Bohemian, he was profuse in his apologies to Madame de Maintenon, to Marotte, and to Louise: and asked their witness to the kindness and civility of his treatment towards them.

Madame de Maintenon cut short his protestations with a contemptuous gesture; and bidding her *laquais* mark the number of the house, and the appearance of the gipsy, left the room, accompanied by her two *protégées*.

Then mounting her carriage, she placed them opposite to her; and giving the order to her attendants, "*A Vaugirard,*"—they drove off rapidly along the Rue d'Enfer.

CHAPTER XI.

MAITRE PICARD PROSECUTES A SUCCESSFUL CRUSADE AGAINST THE STUDENTS.

THERE are very few portions of Paris which have retained their physiognomy of the *moyen âge* with less change than the Quartier Latin. The narrow tortuous streets have undergone little alteration since they were first built: few new thoroughfares have intersected the dense cluster of tall glooming houses that bound them: in fact, as far as the line of the Rue des Fosses, whereon the ramparts were still partly situated at the time of the romance, everything has remained nearly in the same state for centuries. The humble nature of the articles exposed for sale in the different shop windows, and the small prices attached thereunto, were the same formerly as now. For the denizens of this learned "Pays" have been, time out of mind, the members of

the different schools: and poverty and clerkship ever wandered hand-in-hand together about its venerable streets or ruminated in its cloistered quietudes.

Yet have not the livelier parts of the city, most known to passing sojourners, a fiftieth part of the interest which is attached to the dirty old quartier wherein our scene now passes, although money has ever been the scarcest article to be found within its limits, since the days when the "Clostre St. Benoyt" and "Hostel de Clugny" were newly erected buildings. We ourselves have lived merrily therein, in small cabins at the extreme summits of houses, where carnival irregularities drove us to restrict our expenses, literally to a few sous a-day—when three hard eggs, some bread, and a cruet of wine formed a jovial dinner: and a pair of bright eyes could sometimes be found to laugh in company over such an humble meal as this, and desire none better. Certainly, if such a thing as disinterested affection exists in the world—which at times we feel inclined to doubt, —it is to be found in the Quartier Latin. And then its associations! It conjures up no visions of English *parvenus*, vulgar tourists, and Meurice's Table d'Hôte: you would not find a *Galignani's Messenger*, or a cake of Windsor soap, throughout its entire range. No: all your thoughts would be of doublets and pointed shoes — of rapiers and scholars of Cluny: of anything, in fact, the reverse to what would suggest itself on the other side of the river.

But our hobby is fairly running away with us over a course we have before traversed: we must return once more to that which has long past. In 1665, there stood at the corner of the Rue des Mathurins and Rue de la Harpe, in the very heart of this venerable division of Paris, the shop of "Maître Picard, Chapelier." It was a modest edifice, with one large window, in which were displayed hats and caps of every age and style. For the students then, as now, held prevalent fashions in great contempt, and dressed according to their whims and finances, or in whatever they contrived to capture in night skirmishes from the persons of the *bourgeoisie*.

To advertise his calling Maître Picard had erected a

sign in front of his house, over and above the intimation just mentioned. It was a huge hat of red tin, gaily adorned with gilt edges, from which, on certain festivals, bright ribbons floated in the draughts of wind that whisked round the corner of the streets, to the great admiration of the passers-by in general, coupled with wonder that it had remained so long unmolested in such a precarious locality as the neighbourhood of the Hôtel Dieu and Sorbonne. But this was because it was a little too high up for them to clutch it; a few feet lower, and long ago Maître Picard would have been horrified some fine morning at perceiving his sign had vanished: for, as we have seen, the rotund little patrol was one of the marching watch; and the same *antipathie vouée* which the student of the Quartier Latin at the present time exhibits towards the Sergent-de-ville, existed quite as forcibly two hundred years ago between the scholar of Cluny and the Garde Bourgeois.

Since the rude treatment which Maître Picard had received from the hands of his sworn persecutors at the "Lanterne," in the Rue-Mouffetard, he had neglected no opportunity of interfering with their enjoyments, and various had been the schemes which Camille Theria and Philippe Glazer had planned for revenge. But they had all failed; especially every enterprise against the hat, to which their designs were principally directed. For they knew that the gigantic metal sign was the pride of Maître Picard's heart, and the glory of the Rue des Mathurins—that its abstraction would crush his public spirit: and that as such, no stone should be left unturned in effecting its destruction. And indeed, as far as that went, they tried to carry out their intentions in a very literal spirit, as the broken state of the rude pavement below, and several large dents in the enormous hat above, fully testified.

At last, by what appeared to be a fortunate chance for the marauders, Jean Blacquart, the Gascon, took a lodging on the upper floor of the house; being principally led to such a step, by a feeling of gratitude for the timely intercession of Maître Picard, when his fellow-students were about to hang him. The instant this became known, it was resolved that advantage should be taken of his occu-

pancy to carry off the hat. Blacquart, at first, plumply refused to assist in such an irregular proceeding: but after Theria had assured him that in the event of his non-compliance he would be dropped in the Bièvre, or slowly roasted before the fire of the *cabaret* in the Rue Mouffetard, the Gascon assented. A particular night was fixed upon for the attempt, and a meeting of the "Gens de la Courte Epée" called at a tavern in the Rue des Cordeliers — the site of the present Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine, to effect this object.

That night Maître Picard, not being on guard, resolved upon indulging in potent drinks and toothsome viands, in his little parlour behind the shop. He had closed his ware-room at an early hour; and having invited Jean Blacquart to join him, — for the Gascon was not of the marauding party, although he had an indirect part to perform in the outrage, — was discussing hot wine with his lodger a little after curfew, and listening to his rhodomontades connected with his profession, and deeds, and actions generally.

Jean had told a great many narratives about encounters he had won (which had never taken place), and enemies he had killed (who were still alive), increasing the marvels of each with each cup of wine, until the fulness of his heart, coupled with his fear of being mixed up in the affair, led him to inform Maître Picard of the intended attempt upon his hat, to be made that very evening. The apartment occupied by the Gascon was at the top of the house; it had formerly been a granary — such as may still be seen in Paris — and outside a small but strong wooden crane was fixed, hanging over the doomed sign. To the rope of this, a loop was to be made, and then Camille Theria, who had taken the danger and the glory of the enterprise to himself, was to be hauled up until he came within reach of the hat, which he was to take from its fixings, and bear off in triumph.

The first feelings inspired in the breast of Maître Picard, as he heard this bold scheme unfolded, were those of fright: the next partook largely of revenge.

"How many will there be?" he asked.

"Oh! a hundred," replied Blacquart. 'It was the 'Gascon' for twenty.

"Bless me!" said Maître Picard; "a great number—an awful number. You have told me to-night that you once fought a score yourself; but I don't think you could face so many."

"I don't think I could," said Blacquart. "I will try, if you please; only if my courage led me into any rash attack, I might be fatally wounded, and then what a scrape you would get into."

"True—true," said Maître Picard, wiping his face, and taking a long draught of wine; "and it is the same with me. My frame is rather round than large; but there is a great spirit at work within it, which I cannot always command. I will call together the Garde Bourgeois."

"Will not their assembling alarm the others?" said Blacquart.

"Not at all—not at all," returned the chapelier. "We will have them come by twos and threes, and hide in my shop."

"Excellent!" said the Gascon.

"Will you summons them, then?" asked Maître Picard.

"I think not," said Blackquart; "although they know me as a daring and gallant coadjutor. My appearance in the streets might provoke suspicion with any of the students I might meet."

To the joy of the Gascon, who thought inside the house the safest position with such an event about to come off, Maître Picard rose, with some trouble, from his settle, and, puffing and blowing, started out to summons his brother-guards. The Gascon remained to finish the wine; which, having done, he felt so nerved, that he sang bold and warlike songs to himself, and then drawing his sword fought imaginary duels with nobody, and slaughtered many chimerical adversaries, concluding from mere want of breath, in high good humour with himself and his prowess. He was yet panting from his late courageous exertions, when his landlord returned with a

few of his brethren in the guard, and these were speedily followed by others, who were stationed in the shop and parlour. Their presence increased the Gascon's valour to such a pitch that, when he saw they had all arrived, he even offered to go and fight the students himself. And had it not been for one of the guard, who, from sheer wickedness, recommended Jean to do so, to his extreme terror, there is no knowing to what lengths he might have gone, or what wonderful actions he might have committed.

The curfew sounded; the lights disappeared in the Quartier Latin, as the shops were closed, and the glimmer of the lanthorns alone illumined the thoroughfares. Maître Picard disposed the Garde Bourgeois for a proper *sortie*, and then went up to Blacquart's room, accompanied by the student, whom he placed to keep a look out at the window.

"I think I hear them coming," said Jean, after he had been a short time at his post.

"They are marching in order," observed Maître Picard, with breathless attention; "the students have mustered strongly."

"No; it is the Guet Royal," returned the Gascon, as the night-patrol came round the corner of the Rue de la Harpe.

"I think we had better call them in, too," said the affrighted little hatter.

"No—no," answered Jean; "the disturbance, and the clank of their arms will alarm the others. Beside, is there not enough to protect you? You have me."

"Very true," said Maître Picard. But he said it as if he did not think it was. However, he was resigned to his fate, and the Guet Royal passed along the Rue des Mathurins, turning off towards the Sorbonne.

"They will not be back for half-an-hour," murmured Maître Picard, as the last cresset disappeared round the corner.

"Then they will be too late for our gentlemen," said the Gascon; "for I hear them now coming in reality."

In effect, he was right. The students had evidently

waited until the patrol had passed, knowing that they would be for a certain time uninterrupted; and they now came quietly in front of the house. One of them, whom Blacquart knew to be Camille Theria, clapped his hands, and the Gascon replied to the signal.

"They wanted to hang me the other night," said he; "but I mean to succeed better with them than they did with me. And yet," he added, as he looked below, "there seems to be a great many of them."

"What are you waiting for?" asked the *chapelier*.

"Me? oh! nothing — nothing," said the Gascon. His blood was ebbing down rapidly every instant. "Only I was thinking if you were to make a speech from the window, and forgive them, how they would esteem you; and, perhaps, it would save bloodshed."

Theria, who was below, repeated the signal.

"Lower down your rope," said Maître Picard, who was peeping over the parapet.

"Upon my honour, I don't much like to do so," said Blacquart, as his last atom of heroism evaporated.

"If you don't let the line down immediately, I will give you into custody below as an accomplice," said the bourgeois, in wrathful accents.

Another impatient signal from Theria was heard; and poor Jean, in a terrible fright, proceeded to unwind the cord from its winch; whilst the hatter kept looking just over the parapet, to see what was going on.

"It is almost close to the ground," he said. "Now it touches it; and that rascal Theria has got hold of the end. He puts his foot in it. Huzza! huzza! now wind away; he is ours."

And the rotund little man delivered himself up to the performance of such joyful gymnastics, that at last his hat fell off, and tumbled into the street. A student, who saw it fall, thought it was Theria's, and cramming his *casquette* into his cloak-pocket, put it on, until the other should come down.

"Now, stop! for your life!" said Maître Picard to the Gascon, who kept winding away in great trepidation, but saying through it all, that he was easily accomplishing the

work of six men. "Now stop! he is on a level with the sign: let him remain there."

Jean implicitly obeyed: the catch fell into the toothed wheel, and he came to the window, whilst Maître Picard hurried down stairs very rapidly, by reason of his gravity, and told his fellow police that it was time to make their charge. They accordingly rushed into the street, and were face to face with the students.

"Trapped!" ejaculated Theria, as he felt his progress stopped, and saw the tumult below. "Oh, Master Blacquart, you shall pay for this."

A terrible riot ensued. What the students wanted in numbers, they made up in strength and daring. They wrested the partisans from their opponents to turn against them, and in all probability would have come off the conquerors, had not Maître Picard opened one of his upper windows, and discharged a blunderbuss therefrom, — not to injure his enemies, but to give the alarm by the report of this novel weapon, not long imported from Holland.* It had the desired effect; and in a few minutes brought back the Guet Royal.

Some of the students fled at once as they saw the night-patrol advance, for they were men with whom there was no trifling. Those who remained, being a small quantity, were now captured by the Bourgeois: and then Maître Picard emerged from his house, and Theria was let down, and seized.

"Huzza!" cried the little *chapelier*, giving way to fresh antics. "We have caught you--eh? Take him away: to the guard-house with such a brawler. Stop— no — the glory shall be with me. Gentlemen of the Guet Royal, march on with your other prisoners: the Garde Bourgeois will take charge of the ringleader. *Mauvais sujet* — ugh!"

Camille took no notice of Maître Picard's address. He was, however, chafing with anger inwardly at being thus caught.

"To the guard-house!" continued Maître Picard, "without loss of time. I have rid Paris of a brigand — a cut-purse. *En avant!*"

* Blunderbus is derived from the Dutch *donderbus* — a thunder-gun.

Drawing his sword as well as his short arms and fat little body permitted, Maître Picard placed himself before the prisoner, and two of the others followed. In this state they started off, the hatter leaving Blacquart in charge of his shop,—and proceeded towards the nearest *corps du garde*. But, as they were passing down the Rue de la Harpe, Camille, who had been watching his opportunity, suddenly tripped up the *chapelier*, and sent him rolling into the kennel that rushed down the middle of the street, before he had time to save himself. He then as rapidly dealt a couple of heavy blows to his followers, and whilst they were aghast at the unexpected attack, rushed down the Rue de Foin, in the obscurity of which he was immediately lost. But we must follow him along it, leaving the two guards, first to recover themselves, and then to pick up Maître Picard, in as sorry a plight as might well be.

Flying along the narrow thoroughfare, a few minutes brought Camille to his abode in the Place Maubert. He went directly to the apartment of Philippe Glazer, who was at home, and briefly told him what had happened.

"It will not stop here," said Theria. "That wretched bourgeois can make a nasty business of it if he likes, and I must leave Paris at once."

"Immediately?" asked Glazer.

"Directly. My studies, such as they have been, are nearly finished; and Liège will do for me to settle at as well as anywhere else. Besides, it is my home."

"Can I assist you in anything?" asked Philippe.

"In one thing only,—a little money, for I am quite cleaned out by *mes camarades*. In return, Philippe, I leave you everything—my books, my rapier, and my Estelle—poor Estelle! Don't ever part with my rapier, whatever you do."

Glazer smiled at his friend's speech, as he collected what little money he had by him, and gave to the other.

"Ten thousand thanks, Philippe," said Camille, "it shall be repaid some day; we do not cheat one another."

"I will trust you," said Glazer; "is there anything else I can do for you?"

"One thing," said Camille, more seriously. "I am not one to boast of favours bestowed, or even hint at them, but you will find a packet of love-letters in my old escriban. Burn them all — they are from Madame de Brinvilliers."

Glazer uttered an exclamation of mingled incredulity and surprise.

"It is true," said Camille; "she wrote them to me, telling me that I was the only one she ever loved, — that all the other attachments had been madness — folly. Pshaw! each avowal was stereotyped, and did for others as well as it will again do for the next. Burn them all. Adieu! and tell Estelle to console herself."

And, warmly shaking his friend by the hand, Theria flew down stairs, leaving Glazer almost bewildered at the rapidity of the interview, and the avowal he had just heard.

CHAPTER XII.

EXILI SPREADS THE SNARE FOR SAINTE-CROIX, WHO FALLS INTO IT.

THE tower of the Bastille, which the under governor had designated as the Tour du Nord upon Sainte-Croix's arrival, was generally known as the *Tour de la Liberté*, which title, from the mockery of the appellation, was not in frequent use. The Bastille, it may be known, consisted, at that time, of eight towers. Two of these — the Tour du Trésor, so called because it was chosen as the depôt of the wealth amassed by the sagacious Sully for Henry the Fourth, and the Tour de la Chapelle,—were the most ancient, and had formerly been merely the towers which flanked the entrance to Paris by the Faubourg St. Antoine. Subsequently the Tour de la Liberté and the Tour de la Bertandière were added opposite to those just spoken of — the latter being the one chosen, some centuries afterwards, as the prison of the unfortunate "Man in the Iron Mask." The Tour de la Liberté was at this

early period the most northern elevation — hence its second name: and the entrance to the city lay between those four towers, on the spot where the huge cast of the elephant, intended for the fountain, may be recollected by the visitor on the way to Père la Chaise. To those four towers Charles the Sixth added four others; about 1383, chambers were hewn in the thickness of the wall between them: drawbridges were erected, a fosse dug around, and the Bastille was completed.

All these towers contained the cells for the prisoners: and as a portion of our story must now necessarily pass in the Bastille, we will call the attention of the reader to them: but briefly as possible. In each tower were five ranges of cells. The lowest of these, or *cachots**, were the most horrible, receiving what little light they had from the lower part of the fosse. The floor was covered with a nauseous slime, perpetually oozing from the low grounds around, and laden with rank and poisonous exhalations. Here noisome reptiles — the toad, the lizard, and the rat, had their homes — sweltering and crawling on the damp floor; from which the only refuge allowed to the wretched prisoner was a species of bed, formed by iron bars projecting from the wall, a few inches above the ground. In many of these sinks, still greater misery was contrived for the occupant. The lower part was a mere well, cut out in the form of an inverted sugar-loaf, in which the prisoner was compelled to exist, so that the feet found no level resting-place, nor could the body repose.

Next in order of the "chambres rigoreuses" were the iron cages. They were above the *cachots*, and were formed of small beams of wood plated with iron, being about six feet square. The next were termed the *calottes*. These chambers were the highest, being built in the summit of the towers, and so contrived that the prisoner could only stand upright exactly in the middle, and there was scarcely

* "The hapless Prince d'Armagnac and his brother were confined in these *cachots* by Louis the Eleventh. They were taken out twice a week to be scourged, in the presence of Philippe O'Huillier, the governor, and had some teeth drawn every three months. The eldest lost his reason; but the youngest, delivered at the death of Louis, published these facts, which would otherwise have been considered too terrible for belief." — *Hist. de l'Ancien Gouvern. par le compte de Boulainvilliers*, tom. iii. Lettre 14.

space in them for the length of a bed, although the depth of the loopholes was ten feet, being the thickness of the wall. These were small, admitting very little light, which was farther excluded by two ranges of thick iron bars, within and without. Being close to the roof, the heat of the sun in summer was insupportable, converting them almost into ovens ; in winter the cold was equally terrible, since there was little space for a fire. In these rooms the victims were usually confined who were destined for the *oubliettes* — the wheels armed with cutting points, which, turning round, drew the sufferer between them and cut or tore him to pieces.

The intermediate chambers were somewhat more comfortable. They were fourteen or fifteen feet high ; and, although the windows were heavily barred and counter-barred, were tolerably well lighted ; whilst, from some of them, views could be obtained of the boulevards and various parts of the city. The rooms were generally numbered, and named after the towers in which they were situated. The one that Gaudin de Sainte-Croix now entered was the *Onzième Liberté* — and by the same title was the occupant known during his sojourn in the prison.

The recognition, both on the part of Gaudin and Exili, was instantaneous, and an expression of surprise burst from the lips of the former as he discovered the falcon countenance of the physician. But he directly recovered his composure, recollecting that the gaoler was still in the room ; and remained silent until Galouchet departed, closing after him, one upon another, the three massy doors which, covered with heavy locks, bolts, and iron studs, guarded each of the chambers.

The first impression of Exili had been that some new punishment was in store for him, upon seeing his late enemy enter, accompanied by the functionary. But as the man left, and Gaudin, dashing his hat upon the ground, threw himself in an old *fauteuil* at the foot of the pallet destined for him, he perceived that he also was a prisoner. A savage gleam of triumph passed across his livid countenance as he bade Sainte-Croix welcome in a tone of mockery.

"My prophecy has been speedily fulfilled," said Exili; "I gave you six months — little more than thrice six hours have passed, and we meet again. You may find good reason to burn me as a sorcerer, when you wish entirely to get rid of me."

Gaudin smarted under the taunt; but his face betokened no trace of the annoyance. He took the empty sheath of his sword, which still hung at his side, and, smiling carelessly, played with the lace that was fixed round his boot.

"It is an odd rencontre," he said; "but you are no sorcerer, or you would not have been here. On that score you are safe. We stand a chance of being together for some time — perhaps we may become better friends."

"Friends!" replied Exili, with a short, dreary laugh. "Never: we are not made of the stuff that can harbour such a dull sentiment. Crime, — purpose, — common interest, — might set up some tie between us; but not friendship."

"I care not what you call it," said Gaudin; "our battle has become a drawn game, and we must make the best of it. Yesterday I had *my* revenge — to-night your turn has arrived. On the score of vengeance, then, we are quits. At least towards each other," he added, after a moment's pause.

Exili had never taken his eyes from Sainte-Croix since he entered; his piercing glance appeared to be scanning the thoughts that prompted every word the other uttered. Gaudin's last speech appeared to have awakened fresh attention.

"And to no one else?" asked Exili, emphatically, still looking fixedly at him. "May I ask through whom you were sent here?"

"Through the cause of all that can most wring and crush us, either in this world or that which is to follow, for aught I know."

"A woman?"

"Your divination is again right."

"And that woman is the Marchioness of Brinvilliers?"

"I mentioned no name," said Sainte-Croix, quickly.

"You did not," replied Exili; "and yet I knew it.

You cannot suppose that I should remain ignórant of what has been the gossip of the shops and carrefours of Paris, throughout many a fine spring afternoon this year."

"Her husband never knew it," said Sainte-Croix, for the minute thrown off his guard, and admitting the truth of what had been a random venture on the part of Exili.

"In such case the husband is always the last," returned the physician, "to credit his own dishonour. And yet it was not Antoine Gobelin who sent you here."

"You are right once more," said Gaudin. "It was M. d'Aubray, the lieutenant-civil, her father. Curses wither him!"

The features of Exili assumed an expression that was perfectly fiendish, as he gazed upon Sainte-Croix, who was divesting himself of his garments, and flinging them carelessly about the room here and there, before lying down upon the truckle-bed. Not wishing to extinguish the lamp, yet disliking the glare in his eyes, he had removed it to the chimney-corner, near which was placed a rude table.

"It is cold!" he said, as he endeavoured to warm his hands before the dying embers.

"So I thought last night," said Exili; "but I am already inured to it. It is, however, a different change for you, from the Hôtel d'Aubray. I am used to strange apartments; and I have no lady-love who may play me false during my imprisonment."

A spasmodic tremor passed through Sainte-Croix's frame; his hands were clenched, and his lip quivered. The convulsion was slight and rapid, but it was observed by Exili. He went on.

"It is annoying, too, to dream that others may share her affections whilst you are imprisoned here. Her years are but few — her blood is young and vivid. The marquis, too, neglects her, — so goes report in Paris, — and she must have some one to attach herself to."

"No more! — no more!" cried Gaudin, with a sudden and violent outburst of passion. "Fiend! demon! what drives you thus to madden me?"

"These are harsh terms to christen me by," returned Exili, with a ghastly smile; "especially when it is in my

power to place in your possession what you now desire above anything else the world could bestow."

"And what is that?" asked Gaudin, assuming an indifference through his anger.

"Vengeance!" returned Exili, as he raised himself on the pallet, and glared upon Sainte-Croix like a basilisk.

A scornful expression of contempt was Gaudin's only reply.

But Exili saw that his prey was coquetting with the bait. He continued:

"There are dull moralists and fools who will tell you that revenge is an ignoble passion, fitted only to those groveling spirits who dare not resent an injury, and yet are too sharply stung to pass it over. Believe them not; it is a glorious triumph of retribution, although the success of the cast will alone decide whether it will be called justice or cowardice by the world. You are indebted for your present position to Dreux d'Aubray; you burn for vengeance. If you fail, the world will call you pitiful, mean, *lâche:* succeed, and you become a hero. Suppose I make that success certain!"

"Pshaw! you are leading me on to some new toil," said Gaudin. "We are powerless here: were we otherwise, I should mistrust you. This is no place for bandying smooth phrases; nor are our relations towards each other such as require them. You know my sentiments towards you." Then, after a moment's pause, he added, "What plan do you propose?"

"As I expected," thought Exili; "his curiosity is aroused. — It is full late," he continued aloud, as the sound of the bell vibrated through the building from the Tour de la Chapelle. "To-morrow your excitement will have somewhat abated, and all will be explained. Doubtless your couch will prove a trifle harder than the one you have been accustomed to. Good night; and may *she* visit you in your dreams, for you will have little chance here of seeing her otherwise."

And with this last observation, which had the full effect he intended, the physician turned on his pallet and was soon asleep, or affected to be so.

But it was long before Gaudin slumbered. The events of the evening were in themselves enough to drive anything from his mind; and the last conversation with Exili had added fresh wrath to the mingled blaze of anger, jealousy, and impotent desire of revenge that consumed him. At last, the objects in the room imperceptibly faded from his sight, or merged into the strange forms which his half-slumbering senses conjured up; and in this state he lay for upwards of an hour, with a consciousness of existence, but motionless and silent.

Suddenly he awoke — if it could be called awaking from a state that was scarcely a sleep — and cast his eyes across the room towards the bed of his companion. Exili was awake as well. He had raised himself in bed, and, by the light of the lamp which still burned in the chimney corner, was staring fixedly at Sainte-Croix, with the same riveting gaze he had before directed towards him. It was not the look of human intent, — a serpent would have fascinated a bird with the same expression, until the victim fell into its yawning mouth. Gaudin quailed before it — he knew not why; — but there was something terrible in the unclosed and glaring eyes of the physician, which almost precluded him from inquiring what he desired.

"You need not be alarmed," replied Exili, in an unconcerned tone. "Whatever my wishes might have been towards you yesternight, at all events, you are safe *here*. I was attracted by that curious bauble hanging round your neck. Where did you get it?"

He directed Sainte-Croix's attention to a small gold heart, about the size of a walnut, which hung round his neck, and which he had not laid aside in divesting himself of his clothes for the night.

"It is an amulet," said Gaudin, "and contains a charm against an evil eye. I have heard it will also yield visions of the future. I never put it on one side."

As he spoke, he opened the heart in its centre, and took out a crystal of a reddish colour, set in a circle of silver. Exili gazed at it still more earnestly than before

"It is a beryl!" he exclaimed.

"Eyes less piercing than yours might tell that," replied

Sainte-Croix. "Your fool affected to expose one for sale on the Carrefour du Châtelet but a short time since."

"I will tell you more," continued Exili, still fixing his scrutinizing gaze upon the amulet. "The names of the four angels are graven round it: they come in order thus, — Uriel, Raphael, Michael, Gabriel. I have seen that stone before. Where did you get it?"

"It matters little to you," replied Gaudin: "suffice it to say, it is my own."

"And you did not read your arrest on its surface?"

"I have kept it merely as a charm," answered Gaudin.

"Then you have abused its power," continued Exili. "Listen! do you hear the night-wind howling round the towers of the Bastille and rushing down the chimney of our apartment? To common ears it is but the wind — a viewless thing that comes and goes, hurrying on around the world until its force is spent, and it dies in nothingness. To me it is far otherwise," he continued, as his eyes blazed with unwonted fire, and he raised his arm on high. "Each gust is laden with the wrath of some damned spirit waiting to be called upon to make that beryl a mirror of the future, and you neglect the appeal. Give me the stone, and let me read the fate you care not to know."

Gaudin gazed at Exili with fixed astonishment. The physician extended his hand, and the other took the amulet from his neck and gave it to him.

"It is the same!" exclaimed Exili with a smothered exclamation of surprise, as he again looked intently at Gaudin. Then, fixing his eye on the stone, he continued:

"Its surface is dull. I can see forms moving on it, but they are indistinct, and dance from before my sight like motes, all except your own, and that remains. You may yet triumph."

Gaudin was awed by the manner of Exili; at another time he would have laughed his predictions to scorn, but the circumstances, the hour, and the place, combined to make him think very seriously of his companion's remarks.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I will reply by putting another question," said Exili; "where did you get this mineral?"

"I have had it many years; let that suffice. Now, I claim to know the import of your speech."

"You may yet triumph," repeated the Italian; "and by my means alone. I am not, you see, the enemy you thought me. Again, I say, wait until to-morrow."

"Nay, to-night," exclaimed Sainte-Croix. "I beseech you tell me what you mean."

"The charm may be broken," continued the other; "it is not yet time."

The manner of the physician had worked upon Sainte-Croix's curiosity strangely. He again implored to know what the other alluded to.

"To-night—now—this instant!" he exclaimed.

"I will gratify you," replied Exili. "To-morrow they will bring me my chemical glasses from the boat-mill, together with such dull elements as the ground yields,—simple and harmless,—in order, as they suppose, that I may practise alchemy. Fools! they little know the change that paltry lamp can work in innocuous earths."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Sainte-Croix.

"To put you in possession of all I know myself," continued Exili, "and bring Marie de Brinvilliers once more near you, unquestioned, undisturbed. Seek no further. The life and death of those you love or hate shall be alike within your grasp. The destroying angel shall become your slave, and go abroad, obedient to your will alone. Your bosom should now harbour but one thought,—and that must be revenge."

Exili threw back the amulet to Sainte-Croix, and sank back on his pillow; whilst Gaudin, finding he returned no reply to his questions, once more sought to fly from himself, and the black thoughts that haunted him, in sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

GAUDIN LEARNS STRANGE SECRETS IN THE BASTILLE.

It was not until Galouchet, the gaoler, entered the chamber of the Tour de la Liberté the next morning, that Sainte-Croix awoke from his slumbers—from one of those bright dreams of freedom, triumph, and happiness—albeit always tempered with some vague mistrust, which haunt our sleeping existence, the fairer in their visioned prospects, the more gloomy and hopeless the reality.

Exili had already risen. He was looking over the contents of a small chest of carved wood placed on the table before him. The gaoler was apparently making preparations for breakfast, clattering some metal plates upon the undraped and rude table, and in the fire-place the dense smoke was creeping through some hissing pieces of damp wood, as the sap sputtered and bubbled from their ends. Gaudin stared about him confusedly. The last impression of his dreams was mingled with his waking sensations, and he remained silent for a few moments, after some incoherent words, to collect his senses. Exili muttered some conventional salute, and then went on with his scrutiny, whilst Galouchet, having put the table in order, according to his own notions, offered his assistance towards completing Sainte-Croix's toilet.

"What charge will monsieur choose to defray for his nourishment?" asked the gaoler, as Gaudin rose from his pallet.

"What do you expect?" inquired Sainte-Croix?

"Parbleu! we have all prices. You may live like a prince for fifty livres a day, or starve like a valet for two. This will include your washing, if you are not over-fond of clean linen, and a candle a-night. The fire-wood you must pay for separately."

Gaudin looked towards the fire-place and the struggling flame.

"Ah!" said Galouchet, divining his thoughts; "the

wood is rather damp to be sure, but that makes it last the longer; and as you and Monsieur Exili occupy the same room, it will come cheaper."

"Is there news in the city this morning, Galouchet?" asked Exili.

"But little," returned the functionary. "Pierre, the scullion, sleeps out of the fortress, and tells me that an *éboulement* took place last night, and the Bièvre burst into some of the carrières of St. Marcel, and fell so rapidly in consequence, that all the mills this side of St. Medard were stopped for three hours.

"Was anybody lost?" inquired the physician.

"It is believed so. A party of Bras d'Acier's gang were hunted out of the vaults between the Cordelières and Montrouge, like rats in our *cachots*, when the rains come; and one of the superintendents at the Gobelins was fished up, half-drowned, from a shaft in the Rue Mouffelard.

"Do you know his name?" asked Sainte-Croix, eagerly.

"I can't say I do," returned Galouchet. "What rate will you fix your *nourriture* at, monsieur?" he continued.

"I care not," said Gaudin; "only let it be something that I can eat."

The day passed on, but the hours lagged so tediously, that Time himself appeared to be a prisoner. Little conversation passed between the two inmates of the cell. Exili was occupied in writing nearly the whole day; and Gaudin, who could ill bear the confinement with his restless and excitable spirit, after the hour's exercise in the great court, allowed to all the prisoners, obtained permission to walk on the ramparts in front of the sentinels. This position commanded a view along the Rue St. Antoine, as well as of the houses in the Rue St. Paul. Towards this point were Gaudin's eyes constantly directed. He beheld people moving in the streets, and over the plains in the immediate vicinity of the city walls; the *coup d'œil* was alive with commerce, and the buz of their voices plainly reached his ear: but he envied them not, nor drew one comparison between their freedom and his state of durance, except when he saw them turn from the

great thoroughfare into the small street wherein the Hôtel d'Aubray was situated. He fancied he could pick out the pointed roof of the mansion from amongst the others; and once he imagined that he saw the delicate figure of the marchioness emerge from the Rue St. Paul, and pass towards the city, without so much as throwing back a glance towards the fortress in which she knew he was confined. And then the hell of jealousy raged in his veins, and he felt the bitterness of captivity. He thought of the circumstances under which he had found her with Theria the preceding evening; then came back the recollection of the impassioned interview, and her apparent devotion to him, until the struggle of his conflicting feelings to establish what he hoped for, over what he dreaded, nearly maddened him.

At length it got dusk, and he could see no more. The murmur of the peopled [city died away; the lights appeared in the embrasures of the Bastille, and the night-wind chilled him. He descended once more to his cell, and found his gaoler there.

"I was coming to seek you, monsieur," he said, "for the curfew will soon ring. Mass! your supper is nearly cold. Here is a slice of *rôti*, a plate of eggs, and a salad; you could not fare better at home."

"Have any of my things come?" asked Gaudin.

"They are being overlooked in the *corps du garde*," replied the man. "By the way, monsieur, my sweetheart, Françoise Roussel, gave me this note for you, when I met her without the walls this afternoon. She did not care that it should be read by the governor."

Gaudin snatched the note, and discerned the handwriting of the marchioness. Hastily tearing it open, he read:—

"Be true and patient; all may yet be well, and you will be revenged. Rely on me to aid you; we have gone too far to retract. In life, and after it, yours *only*,

"MARIE."

"I must put out your light," said Galouchet. "Last night you were brought in late, and nothing was said; but neither fire nor lamp can be allowed between curfew and sunrise."

"You can have it, my good fellow," said Gaudin, still quivering with the emotion which the letter had called up. "Here — here is some money for you. I will keep your secret. You may retire."

The man raked out the embers on the grate, and departed. As soon as the clanking of the three doors that shut in the cell had ceased, Exili, who till now had remained quiet, arose from his table, and, approaching Sainte-Croix in the darkness, said rapidly,

"I will now show you some of the mysteries by which my career has, up to yesterday, thriven. But, first — precaution!"

He took his cloak, and by the aid of the forks on the table, fixed it so that it covered the window, the position of which could be plainly ascertained by the faint moonlight from without, and then he returned towards the table at which he had been sitting.

"The clods without think that our light and darkness is subservient to their will alone; but the elements obey not such idiots. The ether which percolates all things — vitalized and inorganic — setting up a communion between them, reveals not itself to the uninitiated. With me, the various elements are as abject slaves, whom I can summons at my bidding."

As he spoke he dashed a small rod he held against the wall, and a flame so bright that Gaudin could hardly look upon it burst from its extremity. In another moment he had relighted the lamp, and he then shook the blaze amongst the embers on the hearth, which were presently rekindled. Sainte-Croix looked upon his companion with the gaze of one bewildered. Exili read the expression of the other's features, and continued, perceiving his advantage: —

"Life and death are equally within my grasp. Whom shall I call up? Will you see the ghastly corpse of the *Croce Bianca*, at Milan?"

"No! no!" cried Gaudin, covering his eyes with his hand, as if he dreaded to meet the horrid sight.

"Will that serve to recall its memory as well?" asked Exili, throwing a phial upon the table.

A glance sufficed to show its nature to Sainte-Croix. It was a small bottle of the terrible Aqua Tofana — the "Manna of St. Nicholas de Barri."

"That mentruum is powerless, compared to what I am about to show you. But first, look here."

He stooped beneath the table, and pulled out a species of cage, in which several rats were huddled together, fighting, and scrambling over their fellows.

"Where did you get those vermin from?" inquired Gaudin.

"There are more in the Bastille than are wanted," replied Exili. "They have been willingly granted by some poor wretch at the base of our tower. Galouchet bought them. I told him they were to study anatomy from."

He plunged his hand fearlessly amongst them, and drew forth one of the shrieking animals. Then squeezing its throat, he poured a drop or two of the fluid down the mouth. The rat gave a few convulsive throes, and he threw it down dead upon the table.

"You see the effect of the potion," he continued. "Now, look here."

Pouring the greater part of the remaining liquid of the phial into a glass, he coolly drank it off before Gaudin could arrest his hand. But no effect supervened. Instead of falling lifeless as Sainte-Croix had anticipated, Exili gazed at him, and, with a short, hollow laugh, threw the empty bottle amongst the embers.

"Are you man or demon?" asked Gaudin, scarcely trusting to his senses.

"Neither," said Exili. "I have lost the sympathies of the former; the latter I may be hereafter. I have studied poisons, as you see; but I have also studied their antidotes. Have you kept the small phial by you, which you bought of me at Milan?"

"It has never been out of my keeping until now," said Gaudin.

"With that you could command twenty lives," said Exili; "and yet my remedies could so blunt and weaken its malignity that I would take it all at one draught. You shall learn more. Attend!"

From his box of carved wood he drew forth a series of test glasses, and half filled them with water from the prison *cruche*. He next took a small flacon, and pinched a few atoms of the powder it contained into the first glass, varying the addition in each. Then dropping some colourless fluid into them, one after the other, a precipitate fell down in all, in clouds of the brightest tints, but each different.

"See how completely these dull minerals do my bidding," he exclaimed. "To you, the potion offers no trace by which its nature could be told; to me, there is not an atom suspended in it, in its invisible but imperishable form, which cannot be reproduced before our eyes. Do you believe in me?"

"I do—I do," returned Gaudin. "What price do you put upon the revelation of these mysteries?"

"Nothing — beyond your attention and secresy."

"And yet you love revenge," said Sainte-Croix, eyeing him with mistrust.

"It is my life — my very blood," answered Exili. "And my revenge — the deepest I can have — is to teach you all I know."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply what I have said. You may call it good for evil if you choose, but still it is my revenge. You have time and leisure before you. Make the best of both."

Again Exili gazed at Sainte-Croix with the expression of a vulture hovering about its prey, as Gaudin advanced to the table, and, with some curiosity, handled the apparatus which was spread about it. The physician opened a drawer in the box, which was apparently filled with sand. This, however, was but on a false top, which he drew away, and discovered several small bottles, of the size of one's finger, which he took out.

"These small messengers have worked great events in their time," he said. "This," taking up one, "was the terror of Rome, of Verona, and Milan. I could add much to the records of the Scaliger and Borromeo families, respecting its efficacy. This," he added, pointing to another, "is so potent that a century and a half has not

impaired its power. It is the foam of a dying boar, slain by poison, collected as you see; and was the scourge with which the Borgias swept away their enemies."

"Why is one of the phials gilt?" asked Gaudin.

"Because its contents are the most precious," returned Exili. "Its power baffled even the attempts at imitation of Spara and Tofana. It was discovered by a monk in a convent at Palermo, and the secret has remained with me alone."

"It is clear as water," observed Gaudin, holding it against the light.

"And like water, without taste or odour. It aided many whose hearts clung to one another," he continued, watching Sainte-Croix with his eagle eyes; "by clearing away the obstacles that impeded their union."

Gaudin stretched out his hand, trembling with emotion, and clutched the phial, which he regarded intently, his dilated pupil, parted lips, and short, hurried breathing, showing the conflict of passions that was going on within him. Exili pased a few more of the phials in review before him. From one he let fall a few drops upon the hearth; it hissed and boiled, and the stone remained black where it had been; into another he dipped a piece of gold, and its yellow and polished surface was changed to a dull grey by the contact.

Then throwing out several of the allusions which he found had most deeply stung his companion the night before, he placed himself by the side of Gaudin, and proceeded to explain to him the rough composition of the different articles the box contained. And as he saw the intense attention — the almost gasping eagerness with which Sainte-Croix followed his instructions, he exclaimed almost unconsciously,

"Mine — mine for ever!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CHATEAU IN THE COUNTRY.—THE MEETING.—LE PREMIER PAS.

It was a dreary autumnal evening, sixteen months after the events of the last chapter, and the twilight was fast coming upon a vast forest in the province of l'Ile de France, now known as the department of the Oise. The afternoon had been chill and depressing. The wind moaned through the high branches of the trees in a dismal and monotonous wailing, and the constant rustling of the leaves as they fell to the ground, showed that the season was far advanced. There were few of the wild flowers left. Two or three, here and there, in sheltered nooks, were all that remained to remind one of the past summer. The delicate heathbell trembled in the cold breeze, as it rose amidst the dead foliage; but there were few beside. The birds were silent; the tinkling of the cattle-bells on the patches of pasture-land was hushed, as the animals huddled together, shrinking from the first approach of cold; and no sound was heard to disturb the general torpidity into which nature seemed about to fall, except the echoing noise from the blows of the axe with which the peasants were cutting down the limbs of the trees for the winter store of firewood.

Yet was the Forêt de l'Aigue a pleasant place in summer, when the sunlight danced upon the turf of its long avenues, darting through the quivering foliage, and the ground was powdered with the bright petals of its flowers, from the primroses spangling its sunny banks, to the gentle violets clustering about the mossy bolls of the fantastic trees, adding their odour to the scent-laden air that swept so warmly through the branches. And during this season alone, it might have been conceived that the châteaux, which were built widely apart upon the forest, were inhabited; for the situation was indeed desolate at other times. But although the autumn was, as we have observed, far advanced, one of the largest of these country houses

that a man could come to in a long day's walk, had not yet been forsaken for the winter by its occupants. This was a large rambling building, with many windows and turrets, surrounded by a neglected garden, with a few mutilated stone statues, corroded by the rain of many winters, and enclosed by a rude flint wall, with a broken coping. The walks were overgrown with weed; the ponds were either dry, or covered with slime and dead leaves; and water had long ceased to come from the mouths of the misshapen dolphins that formed the fountains. It was of a class of rural buildings which, in France, always appear desolate and uncared for; but this one was especially so.

In one of the large apartments of this house, a bare, uncarpeted room, which the blazing pile of firewood upon the iron "dogs" of the large hearth could not render cheerful, were two persons — an elderly man and a young female. The former was seated at an escritoir, arranging a vast mass of papers bearing official seals and signatures, that lay before him. His companion was plunged in a large fauteuil at the side of the fire-place, with her hands pressed against her face, as if to shut out all impressions but her own thoughts. She might have been supposed asleep, but for an occasional rapid shudder which passed through her frame, induced by the vivid recollection of some bygone scene of suffering. These two persons were M. D'Aubray, the lieutenant-civil, and his daughter, the Marchioness of Brinvilliers.

"The wind is blowing sharply to-night, Marie" said the old man, as a gust of unusual violence howled round the château, and shook the rattling casements. "We must think about returning to Paris."

"I have no wish to go, *mon père*," replied his daughter, — "to be pointed at as an object of pity, scorn, or curiosity. I would sooner remain here with you — for ever."

She left the fire, and sinking on a low *prie-dieu* at her father's side, took his hand in her own, and looked up in his face with a gaze of deep attachment.

"You have nothing to fear in Paris," replied M. D'Aubray. "The court has had a thousand objects for

its slander since you left; and you have been at Offemont long enough for the whole affair to be forgotten. Besides, you will return acknowledged by me, and with my countenance."

"Will the world believe that it is so, monsieur?"

"If I maintain it, they will, Marie. The dissolute life your husband is now leading at Paris, — his desperate play, — the orgies nightly held at his hôtel, which, if report be true, eclipse all others of the present reign in debauchery, tend to prove that there was also deep blame attached to him. The repentance — sincere, as I hope and trust it is — of more than a year, should disarm all future persecution."

"Antoine has been very cruel to me," continued the daughter. "I should like to see my children; they must be much grown and altered. It has appeared so long a time since they were taken away."

Her voice faltered as she spoke. She covered her face with her handkerchief, and for a few seconds remained silent, as if weeping. There was not a finer actress on the stage than Marie D'Aubray.

"Time will effect much, Marie," said her father, as he fondly passed his hand over her white shoulder, and drew her towards him. "Your husband's anger will be less bitter against you; be satisfied at present in knowing that your children are well and happy."

"And *I* am forgotten," added the marchioness sadly.

"I need not say," continued M. D'Aubray, "that the greatest caution in your behaviour will be necessary on your return. The cause of all this misery, M. Gaudin de Sainte-Croix, has been liberated frum the Bastille, and is once more free, at Paris. You must never speak to, or recognise him again."

"You shall be obeyed, monsieur: too willingly," replied Marie.

"*Bien*, — you understand me," said M. D'Aubray. "I have to rise early to-morrow, and shall retire. When I ring, let Gervais bring up my supper to my room. I have still some writings to arrange."

"I will see to it, *mon père*," replied the marchioness.

"I shall remain up some time longer. I cannot sleep if I go to rest thus early, and those long watchful nights are so terrible."

She knelt upon the *prie-dieu* as her father kissed her fair forehead, and then retired.

As soon as he had gone, and the sound of his departing footsteps was no longer audible, Marie took the heavy candelabrum which was on the table, and drawing aside a curtain of rustling and faded serge, placed the light in the window. Then, watching the sulky beat of a faded *pendule*, rich in shepherds and shepherdesses of blackened gilding, that was on a slab opposite the hearth, she remained lost in thought, starting, however, at the least noise without, although but the clatter of a falling leaf against the window.

An hour wore away. And then she became restless, pacing the room with impatience, and constantly walking towards the window, in the vain endeavour to penetrate the gloom without, unenlivened by the presence of even a single star. Yet suspense was not the only feeling expressed by her countenance. Her eyes sparkled; a breathing glow of warmth and excitement flushed her face; and a slight tremor pervaded her whole frame, extending also to her very respiration. Suddenly these emotions ceased. A footstep was plainly heard without upon the terrace of the *parterre:* it came nearer, and then there was a light tap against the window. She rose slowly, and opened the casement: in another moment Gaudin de Sainte-Croix entered the apartment.

There was no spring — no eager rush into each other's arms. Despite the intense passion which had the instant previous filled her silence and her thoughts, she now remained fixed, and mute as the grave. Neither did Gaudin speak a word, as he found himself before his mistress for the first time since his long and dreary immurement. But the looks on either side were those which wrapped each other in passion; and, by degrees, yet still in silence, and trembling, a hand or foot stole forward, until the two forms which contained those attached, but sinful souls, met in one long and clinging embrace.

"Gaudin! my adored one!" exclaimed Marie. But the concluding accents were hushed by the lips of her lover.

At length they broke from their waking dream with the start and unwelcome sense of reality that follows slumber. And then a sigh rose to Marie's lips far different from the acted sorrow and penitence of the last hour. Passion stamped sincerity and truth upon it.

"And can you mix grief, Marie, with the rapture of this moment?" asked Sainte-Croix in tones of deprecation.

"Gaudin!" replied the marchioness; "this must be henceforth the only manner in which we can meet, — this stealthy, miserable game at hide-and-seek, the only way in which I can show my love, or repay you for your suffering."

The habitual distrust of Sainte-Croix's mind led him to turn one searching look upon Marie's face. But all there was real and confiding. All natures have their minutes of truth, however drilled they may be into daily lying. He was satisfied.

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Do you remain here for ever?"

"No, Gaudin," answered the marchioness; "but my father requires, as the price of his protection and countenance, that I should cease to know you."

The face of Sainte-Croix contracted so suddenly and fiercely that Marie started.

"What is it that frightens you?" he asked suddenly.

She hesitated a moment, and then she answered slowly, and somewhat sadly,

"Nothing."

"And yet there should —" retorted Gaudin: but he paused as abruptly as he had begun the sentence. "Have I not," he added in a gentler and more tranquil tone, — "have I not suffered enough yet to buy your devotion?"

There was "Bastille" in his look. The wily woman was overcome by the wilier man of the world, as though she had been a girl. She clung to him, and pillowed her cheek on his bosom.

"I will leave you if it be your wish," said Sainte-Croix, as he put her arms away. "One word of yours, and I leave you never to return, until —" and he paused slowly

on the words, and uttered them bitterly and deliberately,— "until *his* death!"

Again she started; but Gaudin noticed it not, or was determined not to notice it.

"Shall we part?" he continued, and this time passion gave eloquence to the few words, — "for ever? And yet, if what you have told me of M. D'Aubray's determination be true, it must be so."

"Never! never!" cried Marie sobbing, as her clasp grew closer and closer round his neck. Had it been possible for Exili's soul to have been then and there present, how it would have exulted in the assurance of its second victim!

"Nay, this is weak, Marie. Let us bear the yoke which the world imposes with something like courage," exclaimed Sainte-Croix, with a malignant expression strangely at variance with the silken accents of his tongue.

"You may, Gaudin, if you choose," said the marchioness, "but I cannot." And the tears were dried in her eyes as she spoke, as if by the fire that blazed in them. "If it tramples upon me, I turn: if it spurns me, I return loathing for loathing."

"And what good will that do you?" asked Sainte-Croix, as a sneer came to his lips, but vanished almost in its birth. Step by step he was leading her on to his purpose. "See here," he continued, as he took a packet from his cloak: "sixteen months ago I explained to you the power of this paper's contents: had you been then guided by me, you could have averted my long and dreary imprisonment."

"Gaudin!"

"You have deceived me, Marie. I imagined—fool—idiot that I was! — that I was more to you than aught beside in the world; I now see how we stand towards each other. Farewell!" he added, with studied unconcern; "Paris is wide, and its beauties at present require but little courting. I release you from all ties — our *liaison* is over."

He advanced towards the window as he spoke. The marchioness started forward, and caught him by the arm, exclaiming,—

"Oh! this is cruel, Sainte-Croix! Stop — but an instant. We have arrived at the brink of a fearful precipice—a dark gulf is yawning at our feet, whose depth we may not penetrate. We are doomed to fall into it, but it shall be together. Give me the packet."

Sainte-Croix placed it in her fevered hand as she spoke. And then for some seconds not a word passed between them, and each remained gazing at the other as if they would have looked through each other's eyes to discover what dark passions were rising in their minds.

"Hark!" exclaimed the marchioness, first breaking the silence in a low hurried voice. "The servant is coming. You must leave me, Gaudin. Leave all to me; in a few days we shall be once more in Paris."

There was a hurried but intense embrace; as though their two souls sought to merge into one form, and Gaudin left the apartment in the same manner that he had entered it. The marchioness retired from the window, pale, and tottering in her step; and had scarcely gained her seat by the fire, when Gervais, her father's attendant, entered the apartment.

"M. D'Aubray has rung for his wine, madame," said the man. "You have the tankard in the chiffonier."

"I will give it to him myself, Gervais," replied the marchioness, with an assumption of indifference that was almost spasmodic. "You can go to bed. Nothing more will be wanted."

"I have told Michel to watch the terrain to-night, madame," continued the man. "He noticed some one prowling round the walls just as it was getting dusk."

"There is no occasion for that," replied Marie. "There is nothing out of doors worth their stealing, and very little within. Good night."

The retainer departed; and the marchioness took the jug which the man had brought in, and poured it into an old cup of thin silver, embossed with figures, which might have been the work of Benvenuto Cellini, that stood on the chiffonier. And then, with a hurried glance round the room, she broke the seals of the packet Sainte-Croix had left in her hand, and shook a few grains of its con-

tents into the beverage. No change was visible; a few bubbles rose and broke upon the surface, but this was all.

Taking the tankard with her, she left the large room and went to her father's chamber. M. D'Aubray had retired to rest, and it was evident that sleep had just surprised him, as the lamp was still burning at the side of his bed, and a deed was in his hand that he had been reading. The marchioness gazed at it, for a few seconds, with fixed regards. The traces of the late conflict with her feelings had departed, and her face had assumed once more that terrible and unfathomable expression which has been before alluded to, although a close observer might have seen the pupils of her eyes dilated, and a strange light coruscating in them.

She touched her father lightly, and he awoke with the exclamation of surprise attendant upon being suddenly disturbed from sleep.

"Is it you, Marie?" he asked. "What brings you here?"

"I have brought your wine, *mon père*," she replied. "The servants were up early this morning at work, and are tired. I have sent them to rest."

"Thanks—thanks, my good girl," said the old man, as he raised himself up in bed, and took the cup from the marchioness.

"We want no taster," he continued, "to bear the attacks of hidden poison, with such a Hebe as yourself, Marie; and my old blood cannot spare a drop of this vitalising draught."

A convulsive exclamation broke from the lips of the marchioness, but it was not observed by her father. He drank off the contents of the cup, and then, once more bestowing a benediction upon his daughter, turned again to his pillow.

CHAPTER XV.

VERSAILLES. — THE RIVAL ACTRESSES. — THE DISCOVERY.

ANY one whom business or leisure had taken into the abode of Maître Picard one fine morning, a short time after his affair with the students, would have found the little *chapelier* in a wondrous state of flurry and importance; whilst his best costume was so covered with knots of ribbons and floating streamers, fixed to every available part, that he was a perfect marvel to look at, as he paraded about his shop, and attracted a crowd of *gamins* to peep at him through the wares in the window. In fact, for once Maître Picard had completely eclipsed the glory of the large red tin hat, with the bright pendants that hung over his door, and had whilome formed the object of the students' attack.

But Maître Picard was not the only person in the establishment thus finely arrayed, for his Gascon lodger, Jean Blacquart, appeared in a military costume of great effect, albeit it had been evidently made for one of larger proportions, and the long rapier pertaining to it somewhat interfered with the free progress of the wearer. But when the weapon got between his legs, and threatened to trip him up, Jean kicked it on one side with great disdain, and strode up and down the shop, with the blade clanking at his heels, as though he had just thrust it through the bodies of a score of stalwart antagonists, and was waiting to see who would be bold enough to come forward next.

The gossips of the Rue de la Harpe and Rue des Mathurins were well aware of the cause of this unwonted excitement. There were *portières* in those days, as at present; and they were just as garrulous. The old woman who kept the gate of the Hôtel de Cluny had heard the news from Maître Picard's housekeeper, and it was soon known in the Quartier Latin that the Garde Bourgeois of that division were to have the honour of waiting upon their monarch at Versailles that evening,

where a *fête* was to be given upon an unusual scale of splendour, a large part of the gardens being covered in, and richly decorated, to accommodate the number of guests that it was expected would not find room in the palace*, for the building as it then stood was comparatively small, being little more than the château built by the preceding monarch as his hunting-lodge, upon the site of the windmill purchased from Jean de Soissy.

Maître Picard had borrowed a horse from a neighbour, a heavy Flemish animal, as plump as the bourgeois himself, which went its own pace, and would be put into no other. He would have hired a *voiture de place* to go in state; but, in the first place, the hire was somewhat beyond his means, and secondly, he thought a horse more warlike than sitting all the way to jolt upon a *haquel* or *patache*, his ordinary species of carriage, so he determined to ride; and Blacquart was to be seated upon the pillion, rather against his will, but a manner he still preferred to getting there as he could; for he had adopted his martial costume on purpose to creep into the palace under the wing of Maître Picard, and fell readily into whatever plans the bourgeois proposed.

They mounted amidst the cheers and admiration of the whole neighbourhood. But scarcely had they settled on their respective divisions of the horse's back, when Blacquart, drawing himself up to look imposing, overbalanced himself, and, together with Maître Picard, was shot over upon the ground. The girths had evidently been undone by one of the wicked students of the Sorbonne, who was standing near.

At length this was set right again, their pride preventing either of them from owning to be hurt, and they started on their progress, descending the Rue de la Harpe with great effect, and crossing the river by the Pont St. Michel. Maître Picard assumed a grave and steady bearing, becoming his dignity; but Jean Blacquart put on the

* It is supposed that the *fêtes* of Versailles at the present epoch entirely owed their origin to a desire on the part of Louis XIV. to eclipse the splendour of his *surintendant* Fouquet. At one of the magnificent entertainments given by this individual, every guest invited was presented with a heavy purse of gold.

airs of a gallant, winking at the windows when any pretty face appeared, or singing songs of chivalry and love in accordance with his dress.

It took a long time for Maître Picard and his companion to traverse the four leagues between Paris and Versailles. The road was filled with acquaintances journeying in the same direction; and with these the bourgeois would stop at almost every hostelry for a friendly cup, and sometimes two, in which the Gascon joined him, so that it was well nigh evening when they came to the end of the Avenue de Paris, at the gates of the semicircular outer court which then formed the entrance to the château. There was great confusion and noise in the court. Numbers of heavy carriages, of the quaint fashion of the age, drawn by four, six, and even eight horses, nearly filled the area, besides soldiers, country people, and lacqueys of the different guests. A richly ornamented voiture, drawn by four cream-coloured steeds, preceded them up to the palace-door, whither Maître Picard insisted on proceeding mounted, although Blacquart had descended from his pillion, thinking such a position somewhat derogatory for a man of chivalric demeanour.

The people were running at the side of the carriage, and peeping into it. Maître Picard resolved to usurp his authority to procure a better view for himself; so rolling in some strange fashion from his horse, which he gave over to the care of a bystander, he put the crowd back, and cleared a way to the doors. Four females descended. The two first were elegantly dressed; the third wore a fancy costume, which had possibly attracted the attention of the mob, and the last was attired as a superior attendant. But all were handsome enough to draw the regards of the people towards them. As the first of these dames passed, Maître Picard made a low bow, and then drew himself up, and ruffled his plumes like a peacock.

"Who is that?" asked Jean Blacquart, who had come up to the Cour de Marbre, and was blustering his way through the crowd.

"An excellent lady," replied Maître Picard, aloud, 'and my good friend. It is Madame Scarron, the widow

of the author who wrote the *Ecolier de Salamanque.* He was not a handsome man — Mass ! lame, crooked, and paralytic; but he drew all the world to the theatre in the Rue de la Poterie."

A brilliantly dressed woman followed her, and the crowd expressed their admiration as she rustled past them.

"Stand back, fellow!" said Maître Picard, bustling, "room for Madame la Marquise de Brinvilliers ! Make way there !"

The marchioness smiled, and passed on; Jean Blacquart thought her regards were directed to himself, as he cocked his hat, and stretched forward his leg in an attitude.

"Poor lady!" continued Maître Picard, aloud, for the crowd to hear him. "I know her well; she is separated from her husband on account of his debaucheries. Ah ! Mademoiselle Marotte Dupré ! — permit me to free your dress from the step."

The beautiful actress passed on, smiling, but without noticing the fussy little bourgeois, who, perceiving that the next inmate of the carriage, although equally handsome, was but an attendant, fell back amongst the crowd.

It was indeed a strange quartette that left the carriage, although no one of them knew the position in which she stood towards another. Marie had returned to Paris, in consequence, as it was asserted, of the sudden and fearful indisposition of M. D'Aubray; who had, however, insisted on his daughter accepting the invitation to Versailles, were it only to establish her *entrée* into society. In such a position it was not desirous that she should go alone; and Madame Scarron, who was daily finding fresh favour in the eyes of the king, was selected as a species of *chaperone.* Marotte Dupré, who was to appear in the mask, and for whom Scarron had written some of his best *rôles,* was offered a seat in the voiture. And the fourth was madame's companion, who had lived with her for more than the twelvemonth—the gentle Louise Gauthier.

The carriages and *calèches* of every kind kept bringing up the company. Many were masked — many came on foot, but nearly all were accompanied by torch-bearers;

and when the Cour Royale became filled with these last, the effect was most beautiful. And as dusk came on, thousands of lights burst forth in every direction. Every window was illuminated, as well as the gallery which connected the wings; and in the gardens long rows of lamps surrounded the basins and fountains, or quivered, by reflection, in the water of the canal, then lately finished by Le Notre. Despite the advanced season, the grounds were thronged with the guests; temporary pavilions for jousting and dancing had been built up in the various alleys, and more especially in the Allée du Roi, where a large theatre had been erected: and in the Bosquet de la Salle de Bal, over which a vast tarpaulin had been stretched at a great height, inclosing even the trees — which, from their sheltered position, still retained a great deal of their autumnal foliage — columns of spouting water rose like crystal pillars round the amphitheatre, with brilliant lights so artfully contrived, that they appeared to be burning in the middle of the fountains; and others, in coloured shades, sparkled amongst the foliage as if they had been the enchanted fruit of Aladdin's garden, or twinkled upon the turf like glow-worms, until they were lost in the distance of the avenues. The very climate appeared to be subservient to the will of the luxurious monarch, for, although without the autumn was fast falling, yet in the park and gardens traces of the summer still lingered.

Maître Picard was everywhere, elbowing amongst the throng, followed by Jean Blacquart, who assumed the airs of a person high in command, and gave orders in a loud tone, whenever he fancied any of the ladies were looking at him. Of course they were never obeyed; but he conceived the effect was the same. At length, finding the company turning towards the theatre, the bourgeois took his post near one of the entrances, and Jean stationed himself where he thought he might best attract attention.

The king and his suite had not arrived; and those who had already assembled were talking loudly, in which conversation Maître Picard also joined.

"'*L'Impromptu de Versailles*,' and '*La Princesse*

d'Elide.' Ah! I know them well," he exclaimed, as some of the audience by him mentioned the names of the pieces to be represented that evening. "But they are nothing to those which have gone by. Think of 'Peleus and Thetis.'"

"You saw 'Peleus and Thetis?'" asked Jean loudly, in the manner of people anxious to draw out an acquaintance before company.

"Did I see 'Peleus and Thetis?'" replied the chapelier. "Mass! I supplied the hats. They were shown at the Théâtre du Petit-Bourbon. Think of the figures being arranged by Bouty—the rhyme by Benserade, the scenes by Torelli, and the hats by me, Maître Picard, of the Rue des Mathurins!"

"It is twelve years back, bourgeois," said a bystander. "The king was a mere boy."

"And played himself in five dresses," replied Maître Picard, "representing Apollo, Mars, a fury, a dryade, and a courtier. He wore my hats thrice in the ballet."

"He had more attractions than the applause of the audience to make him play; so it was said," continued the other.

"He was desperately enamoured of the cardinal's niece, Mademoiselle Mancini," said Maître Picard; "but she also wore one of my perukes as the Goddess of Music. The cardinal brought two from Rome."

"Hats, bourgeois!"

"Mass! no—nieces. There was no need to go to Rome for hats whilst I was in Paris."

And Maître Picard evidently felt insulted, and contemplated saying something sharp; but just at this moment further conversation was arrested by a sudden buzz of voices, and that undefined movement which guides a crowd to one point of attraction. "The king! the king!" passed rapidly from mouth to mouth; and the next instant Louis the Fourteenth advanced through an irregular line of spectators, respectfully uncovered.

It was a brilliant *cortège*. In the prime of his age, his noble figure set off by the gorgeous costume of the day, and his keen, intelligent features tempered by that look of high command which seemed native to him, so well it sat

upon his carved lip and lofty brow, Louis passed along, answering the salutations of the crowd with a slight but courteous motion of his richly-plumed beaver, and pausing for an instant from time to time to address a whispered remark to Madame de Montespan, whose imperious beauty well entitled her to her place of honour on the king's right hand. After them came the less-distinguished suite of courtiers and court functionaries: and the mass of spectators, closing in behind them, crowded into the temporary theatre.

The auditory presented a brilliant *coup d'œil* of bright eyes and brighter diamonds, alive with brilliant costumes and waving plumes.

The king, with Madame de Montespan at his side, and those whose rank entitled them to the privilege, occupied the *fauteuils* in the front of the *parterre*, and the rest of the audience filled every inch of standing-room.

Jean Blacquart was in ecstacies. His blood boiled in his veins; and he felt a noble for the night—in fact, almost as great a personage as Louis himself. His next neighbour—a garrulous old abbé—mistaking the Gascon, in his curious military garb, for some distinguished visitor, took apparent pleasure in pointing out to him the notables present.

"You see that gay gentleman," he said, "who is leaning over his majesty's chair, and whispering something to Mademoiselle de Montpensier?"

"It has brought the colour into her cheek through her rouge," said Blacquart. "I wonder what he was saying: I could perhaps produce a great effect with it."

"That's the Marquis de Lauzun," continued the abbé. "He's in favour just now. *Ma foi!* he divides his time between the court and the Bastille pretty equally. If all tales be true, La Grande Mademoiselle would not be sorry to grace him with another title than that of marquis."

"And who is that pretty woman next to her?" asked Jean. "I saw her arrive, but could not hear her name."

"Ah! pretty you may say. There is more wit lying under that calm, grey eye, than in De Montespan's sparkling black one. That is Scarron's widow. Madame

de Maintenon they call her now. She will make her way."

"And, talking to her —"

"De Beringhen, — an honest man, they tell me, and a sincere friend of the king; more's the miracle! And that's De Beauvillers, first gentleman of the king's bed-chamber. How tired he looks!"

"There are two quietly-dressed men in the fourth row," said Jean, indicating the direction. "They are not gay; they look like a couple of crows in an aviary of bright-winged birds."

"They are Racine and Boileau," said the abbé; "Louis has great taste in literature. I have a little poem of my own, which I hope to be allowed to present to his majesty. Bachelier, his *garçon de garderobe* is a cousin of mine. I wish I could read it to you: I think you would like it."

Jean shrunk from the infliction; but luckily the curtain rose at this moment, and the "*Impromptu*" commenced. It was a satire on the courtiers who had ventured to criticise Molière's last production, and on the rival company of actors — the tragedians of the Théâtre de Bourgogne. The king laughed heartily at the hits; and when the great author, Molière himself, delivered the "tag," which contained a well-turned compliment to the monarch, Louis rose from his chair, and bowed to the actor: a condescension which displeased Jean's neighbour extremely.

"To think," said the abbé, "of his paying such a mark of respect to a comedian, — a vagabond whom the church has excommunicated! A bad example, monsieur, — a bad example." And the abbé shook his head.

The *comédie-ballet* of the "*Princesse d'Elide*" followed; and Jean was obliged to avow that it was dull enough for a court performance, although compressed. He was a little relieved, however, by the appearance of Estelle des Urlis, — the "Estelle" whom Theria had left so unceremoniously when he fled to Liége, and who had returned to the profession from which he had taken her. She played *Cynthie*, cousin of the princess; and her costume showed off her neat figure and pretty face to great advantage. Marotte Dupré, who enacted *Aglante*, her

companion and friend, exchanged, as Jean observed, anything but friendly glances with Estelle, whenever the action of the piece brought them together.

"Would you like to visit the *coulisses!*" asked the abbé, when the curtain fell at the end of the second act. "I have the *entrée;* we shall escape the crowd of the *salle,* and perhaps I may find time to read you my poem."

Jean shuddered at the prospect; but his wish to display himself braved even this condition, and he replied,

"With pleasure. I know some of the ladies of the company, and should be glad to exchange a few words with one of them."

He winked significantly as he said so; wishing to impress the abbé with a notion that his acquaintance with the actresses was something very mysterious and improper.

Making their way with difficulty through the crowd, they left the auditory, and after some trouble found the "*entrée des artistes,*" or stage-door.

The abbé procured instant admission; and Jean, who was all impatience to show off his martial dress to Estelle, took advantage of his companion's seizing the button of Chapelle, the friend of Molière, and noted epicurean, to slip away to the *foyer,* where he found, not Estelle, as he had expected, for she was on the stage at the moment, but Marotte Dupré, surrounded by a crowd of admirers, and flinging bright glances and *bon mots* amongst them with a prodigality that was rewarded by a constant accession to her circle.

Jean hovered about in the vain endeavour to thrust his little body into the way of a stray compliment, but in vain, until the appearance of Mademoiselle Molière — as Amande de Béjart was called, though the wife of the great author-actor — drew away the greater number of Marotte's court to the more potent one of the handsomest and most *spirituelle* coquette of the stage. Upon this, with true Gascon assurance, Jean seized the opportunity of commencing a fire of high-flown compliments to Marotte, who, nothing loath, added fuel to the fire by her answers. In fact, he quite forgot Estelle, and was becoming helpless in the toils of her lively rival, when he was suddenly recalled to

his responsibilities by a terrific box on the ear. He turned, and, to his intense terror, beheld Mademoiselle des Urlis, who had watched his flirtation until her woman's jealousy could bear it no longer. Tiresome as Blacquart's admiration was to herself, she could not see it transferred to Marotte, who, from her first appearance in Molière's comedy, seemed to have taken a malicious pleasure in rivalling poor Estelle alike on the stage and the *coulisses*.

"*Trou de Diou!* that you were a man, mademoiselle!" cried the Gascon, as red as a turkey-cock, and fumbling at his sword-hilt.

"Mademoiselle des Urlis is labouring under a misconception," said Marotte, with provoking coolness. She mistakes the green-room for the *Halles* *, and monsieur for an old admirer. It is a souvenir she presents to you, monsieur," she added, turning to the indignant Jean.

"*Fourbe*" exclaimed Estelle. "Do not imagine I shall submit to your impertinence, as I have done."

"Impertinence! Take care, mademoiselle," was Marotte's rejoinder.

"*Tiens!*" rapidly retorted Estelle. *Voilà pour toi!*"

And she slapped Marotte's face, so that the room rang with the blow. Fortunately the crowd was gathered round La Molière, and did not heed what was passing at the opposite end of the apartment.

"A blow!" cried Marotte, springing forward; "this must be accounted for." And, whilst Jean gazed open-mouthed and utterly bewildered, she walked up to Estelle, and in a half-whisper said, "You can use a sword: — unless you are a coward as well as a coquette, meet me, when the comedy is over, on the Tapis Vert, opposite the fountain of Latona. Bring a woman for your second."

"*Soit*," said Estelle; "I ask nothing better. This struggle must finish sooner or later."

At this moment the "call-boy," putting his head into the room, shouted, with the shrill nasal twang peculiar to his class, "Ma'amselle Dupré — Ma'amselle des Urlis!" and the rivals, obeying the summons, passed on to the stage arm-in-arm, radiant with ready smiles, and com-

* Or, in English, "Billingsgate."

menced a most friendly dialogue. Jean, who heard the challenge imperfectly, could hardly believe his ears. He was too averse to fighting himself to believe in the possibility of women resorting to this plan of adjusting a quarrel —which, strange as it may appear to modern minds, was by no means without a parallel in the days of Louis the Fourteenth. However, it is probable he would have taken some step to prevent such a consummation, had he not been seized upon by the persevering abbé, who, drawing him into a corner of the room, contrived to wedge him there with *fauteuils* whilst he read his new poem. Poor Jean groaned, and winced, and yawned, and sneezed, but in vain. On went the flow of the abbé's rounded verse. He knew the value of a victim; and in the vernacular of the nineteenth century, was determined to take it out of him. Meanwhile, the play had terminated, and the guests who were admitted to the honour, had sought the Bosquet de Bal, where the orchestra was vigorously giving out the newest minuets and gavottes, under the experienced leadership of Lulli.

The *Tapis Vert* — the scene of the actresses' rendezvous — was a wide alley of smooth green turf, bordered by statues, fronting the terrace of the château and the magnificent fountain of Latona. All the guests of the fête had been attracted towards the *salle de danse*, and the only sounds that mingled with the distant *fanfare* of the band were the sighing of the gusty autumn-wind as it swept through the long avenues, whirling the reddening leaves to the ground; and the plashing of the numerous fountains.

There were two figures standing near one of the statues, and throwing their shadows athwart the moonlight: they were Marotte Dupré and Louise Gauthier, who, at the request of her friend, had accompanied her, without any knowledge of what was to take place. Marotte was in her stage-dress, over which she wore a *roquelaure*.

"But, what is the purpose of this rendezvous, Marotte?" asked Louise, as her friend uttered a hasty exclamation of impatience, and began pacing up and down before the statue.

"You will learn that in a moment, Louise, if Estelle keep her appointment," replied Marotte.

"Some one comes this way," cried Louise. "See — they are emerging from the shadow of the fountain."

"They are here at last — *Dieu merci!*" exclaimed Marotte. And throwing off her cloak, she disclosed to the astonished eyes of her friend a pair of swords — not "stage" swords, but good serviceable rapiers.

"For the Virgin's sake, Marotte," said Louise, "tell me what you are about to do with those weapons."

"Only a duel between Estelle and myself. Nay," she added, seeing Louise start, "it is not the first time I have handled a hilt."

And, after trying the quality of the blades by bending them until they almost formed a circle, she went through a series of passes and stocades that would have done honour to a fencing-master. Louise was almost too bewildered for speech; but, with a woman's instinct, she threw her arms round Marotte, imploring her to abandon her purpose.

But by this time it was too late. Estelle had come up, accompanied by a second in the person of Mademoiselle Duparc, an actress in Molière's company. The rivals bowed courteously to each other, and Estelle's second with perfect gravity saluted Louise, who was going wildly from one to the other, mingling tears, prayers, threats, ridicule, — but all in vain.

"Is it *à l'outrance?*" asked Mademoiselle Duparc.

"*A l'outrance!*" exclaimed Marotte and Estelle in a breath.

"You shall not murder each other, then!" shrieked Louise. "I will prevent it."

And before they could hinder her, she was off at the top of her speed.

"Quick! quick!" cried Marotte, "or she will give the alarm, and we shall be interrupted." At the same moment she threw herself into position, and Estelle did the same.

The combatants were well matched; but Marotte was the cooler of the two. Had it been a stage-fight, she could not have parried her rival's thrusts, and riposted more dexterously. It would have been ludicrous, but for the

serious purpose of the affair, could a male spectator have seen the two young women in their theatrical costumes, which allowed free motion to the limbs, advancing and retreating, thrusting and parrying, with the skill of practised duellists.

"This for your cutting me out of 'Madelon!'" said Estelle, with a vigorous *flanconnade*.

"That for spoiling my last scene in the ballet!" retorted Marotte, with a thrust in *tierce*.

"Be cool, Estelle!" cried her second.

It was too late. Estelle had laid herself open by a furious lunge over Marotte's guard. Unable to recover herself in time, she received her adversary's point in the sword-arm; and, falling on one knee, lowered her blade in token of submission.

"This will teach you better manners another time, Mademoiselle des Urlis," said Marotte as she wiped her sword. "Ha! Louise has given the alarm, as I feared. Save yourself!"

She darted off through the trees which bordered the alley, as Louise, who had in vain sought Madame de Maintenon, came up, followed by some of the Garde Royale, and accompanied by the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, whom she had encountered passing along the terrace, on her way to the ball. They found poor Estelle faint and bleeding; whilst Mademoiselle Duparc was in vain trying to staunch the blood, which darted freely in jets from a wounded artery in her arm. With a severe reprimand, and a threat of the king's displeasure, the marchioness consigned Estelle to the guards, who, raising her up, quietly turned towards the château, accompanied by her second and Louise.

They had scarcely departed, when, as she was about to turn on her way to the Bosquet de Bal by one of the cross avenues, a voice that thrilled her called, in a low tone, "Marie!"

A man advanced from the trees, and she directly saw that it was Sainte-Croix! His face looked ghastly in the moonbeams, and his eyes gleamed with a light that conscience made demoniac in the eyes of the marchioness.

"You here!" she exclaimed.

"Where should I be but in the place of rejoicing just

now?" replied Gaudin, through his set teeth, and with a sardonic smile. "I am this moment from Paris. We are free!"

"My father?" cried the marchioness, as a terrible expression overspread her countenance.

"He is dead," returned Sainte-Croix; "and — we are free!"

There was a pause, and they looked at each other for nearly a minute.

"Come," at length said the marchioness; — "Come. To the ball!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GROTTO OF THETIS. — THE GOOD AND EVIL ANGELS.

As the marchioness and Sainte-Croix entered the covered room in the Bosquet de la Salle de Bal, it presented a most brilliant spectacle. The whole of the company had adjourned there from the theatre in the Allée du Roi, and many were now dancing on the almost polished turf of the circular *parterre*. Others were seated on the steps, also of turf, which surrounded the salle in the manner of an amphitheatre, except for about one eighth of its circumference, where several fountains of sparkling water shot up nearly to the roof, falling back again to tumble over the steps, which here were of bright pebbles and shells, with an agreeable murmur, until they reached the basin beneath. The roof was of deed blue, strained tightly upon poles, which were high enough to overtop the tallest trees, and an artificial moon had been constructed in it with consummate skill; whilst stars of brilliant pieces of metal hung by short invisible threads from the ceiling, and as they caught the light on their different facets with the slightest vibration, had the appearance of twinkling.

Jean Blacquart was there, as well as the abbé, who having found him a listener to his poem, had never once

left him since the victim was caught in the *foyer* of the theatre. The Gascon, of course, did not dance, being only admitted to the bosquet by virtue of his assumed office of guard, under the auspices of Maître Picard; but he talked so largely, and indulged in such remarkable rhodomontades as to whom he knew and what he had done, that the abbé set him down for some distinguished officer, and was more than ever determined to keep by his side.

Louis was not dancing. He was seated on a platform, slightly elevated from the ground, at the edge of the fountain; and was dividing his attentions between Madame de Montespan, who was still at his side, on his right hand, and another lady on his left, who had now joined the royal party. She was very lovely, although a close observer might have perceived that she was slightly marked with the small-pox. Her skin was delicately fair, and her beautiful flaxen hair clustered in heavy ringlets, less showery than generally worn according to the fashion of the time, over her forehead and neck. Her eyes were blue, swimming in softened light; and her countenance was overspread by a regard so tender, yet so full of modesty, that she gained at the same moment the love and esteem of all who gazed upon her; and yet, when the occasional lighting up of her features as the king addressed her died away, they became pale and sad. Her smile was followed by a pensive expression, which accorded but ill with the festivity around her.

"Ah, times are changing!" said the abbé, as he gazed at her; "and that fair lady's reign is nearly over. I question whether La Montespan, with all her witcheries, will love him half so well though."

"Who is it?" asked Jean.

The abbé appeared slightly astonished at the ignorance of his new acquaintance, as he replied,

"Who could it be but Louise de la Vallière? Ah! hers was a curious destiny. Picked out by Louis to cover his attention to his sister-in-law Henriette, she has supplanted her. But it does not seem likely that the *liaison* will last much longer. Montespan has his heart."

As he spoke, Mademoiselle de la Villière rose from her

seat, and crossed over to speak to Madame de Maintenon, who was sitting on the parapet of the basin that received the water from the fountain. She limped as she walked along, and Jean saw that she was lamé.

"She seldom dances," continued the garrulous abbé, "on account of her defect; and so she does not care always to be present at the balls. I can conceive the reason of her not being at the play."

"How was that?" inquired the Gascon.

"Because the king's sentiments appear to be somewhat changed since our Molière was commanded to write the *Princesse d'Elide*. He was then madly in love with La Villière, although at the time she resisted all his entreaties. What else could these lines mean?"

And Jean flinched, as the abbé again commenced a piece of declamation, quoting from the piece in question in a monotonous tone of dulness suited to the subject:—

"The homage which is offer'd to a countenance refined
Is an honest indication of the beauty of the mind;
And scarcely possible it is, if love be not innate,
That a young prince should come to be or generous or great:
And this above all other regal qualities I love,
This sign alone the tenderness of royal hearts can prove!
To one like you, a bright and good career we may presage,
When once the soul is capable of loving, at your age.
Yes, this immortal passion, the most noble one of all,
An hundred goodly virtues training after it can call;
The most illustrious actions are engender'd by its fires,
And all the greatest heroes have experienced its desires." *

Jean bowed respectfully at the termination of each line, as if he fully concurred in the sentiments it conveyed, but was very glad when it was over.

"Ha! the music has ceased," said the abbé; "and there will be a masque, and some fire-works on the Bassin de Neptune, and the *étang* beyond. That will be also a

* "Le tribut qu'on rend aux traits d'un beau visage,
De la beauté d'une âme est un vrai témoignage;
Et qu'il est malaisé que, sans être amoureux,
Un jeune prince soit et grand et généreux.
C'est une qualité que j'aime en un monarque,
La tendresse du cœur est une grande marque;
Que d'un prince, à votre âge, on peut tout présumer,
Dès qu'on voit que son âme est capable d'aimer.
Oui, cette passion, de toutes la plus belle,
Traine dans son esprit cent vertu après elle,
Aux nobles actions elle pousse les cœurs,
Et tous les grands héros ont senti ses ardeurs."—MOLIERE.

trial for La Vallière. The last fêtes at night were in her honour, and they are going to use the old machines newly decorated. It will be a *renaissance* of the Ile Enchantée."

The company retired to the banks of turf which surrounded the salle de bal, Louis, and a few immediately attached to him, only retaining below, amongst whom were of course La Montespan and La Vallière. When the floor was cleared, a cavalcade of heralds, pages, and squires, all richly clad in armour, and dresses embroidered with thread of silver and of gold, marched into the Bosquet, the music of Lulli's band of twenty-four violins being exchanged for that of martial instruments. When they had taken their places, a large car, made to imitate the chariot of the sun, was slowly moved into the ball-room by concealed means, conveying the sun, surrounded by the four ages of gold, silver, iron, and brass; the seasons, the hours, and other mythological characters. On arriving opposite the point where Louis was sitting, the colossal machine halted, and Spring addressed a complimentary oration to the king, involving also some flattering sentences for Madame de Montespan and Mademoiselle de La Vallière — but more especially for the former. When this had finished, the young person who had played the character of Spring descended from the car, and having offered some rare bouquets to Louis and his favourites, took her place amongst the company. She was the only performer in the masque who did this, being the lovely Françoise de Sévigné — the daughter of Madame de Sévigné — now about eighteen years of age. She had been requested, on account of her extreme beauty and propriety of expression, to play the part, — since, in the fêtes at Versailles, it was not usual for the "*dames de la cour*" to figure.

This portion of the masque having finished, the various mythological personages descended as well, but it was only to bring in a number of long tables, which they placed before the company on the lowest turf-benches of the amphitheatre. These they spread with cloth of gold, and thus gave the signal for another large piece of mechanism to enter, representing a mountain, on which were seated Pan and Diana. When it stopped, these deities opened

various parts of it, and, aided by the others, brought out an exquisite collation, which they placed upon the tables, the music playing all the time. At the first sight of the banquet the abbé bustled off to find a place at the tables; and Jean Blacquart, not wishing to lose the caste which he imagined he had acquired, and knowing that he could not join the feasters, turned upon his heel into the gardens, to see if any where he could discover Maître Picard.

Few who had seen Marie de Brinvilliers, as she mingled in the dances which had been taking place before the appearance of the pageant, would have conceived that any other feelings but those of mirth and excitement amidst the glittering throng by which she was surrounded, were paramount in her bosom. There was the same kind expression — so terrible in its quietude had her heart at that time been laid open, — the same sweet features, almost girlish in their contour (for although she was now thirty years of age, she could well have passed for eighteen), which all admired so much. And when she smiled, the witchery that played around her rosy mouth, as her parted lips displayed that most beautiful set of teeth, whose dazzling whiteness had been the theme of more than one court epigram, captivated by its spell all who came within its magnetic influence. Of all that lovely throng of women who graced the court of Louis Quatorze — the bevy of fair dames, so many of whom swelled the conquest of that heartless, selfish, *roué* monarch — the Marchioness of Brinvilliers was the most fascinating. And this fair creature, who now, in the light of her peerless beauty, of which she seemed unconscious, moved gracefully in the dance — this fearful woman — had broken up a home; deserted her children at an age when a mother's guidance was all they needed, with an unnatural indifference towards her offspring that one might have sought for in vain amidst the lowest animals; and adding parricide, as a *coup* to her already dark career, was yet but on the verge of the terrible line she had marked out to be pursued. Woman, in her love and gentleness — in her ministering care and patient endurance, when all the holiest attributes of her sex exist in her character, approaches far nearer to the angel than her companion, man. Alas! it is

equally true, that in the absence of these characteristics she sinks far deeper in approximating to the demon!

Gaudin de Sainte-Croix had studiously avoided Marie in the salle de bal. The reports which had crept about Paris rendered them both cautious, for the present, of their deportment, although they were about to set all restriction at defiance. Whilst she was dancing, he had walked out into the gardens of the palace, that the night air might come cold and refreshing upon his brow, fevered with the events of the last few hours. He had told her, as he left, where she would find him when the dance concluded; and he now sauntered towards the rendezvous in question.

There formerly existed in the gardens of Versailles, at the right angle of the central body of the palace, where the north wing now stands, a fountain and cavern of marvellous construction, called the Grotto of Thetis. The chapel at present occupies its site, built by Louis in 1699, when, under the influence of Madame de Maintenon, his pursuits changed from those of the most unbridled licentiousness to the extreme of devotion. The statues which it contained, with some fragments of its structure, may be seen, at the present day, by the visitor to Versailles, in the bosquet of the Bains d'Apollon. Three arcades, closed by iron doors of exquisite workmanship, formed the entrance to this grotto, on one of which a representation of the sun, gilt and highly polished, was so artfully contrived as to catch the rays of the real setting sun, and throw an almost magic light into the interior. All the artists that Louis XIV. had about him were employed in turn to ornament this delicious retreat. Perrault had designed the architecture, and Lebrun the figures, with the exception of the principal group, which was by Girardon, still existing, and representing Apollo attended by his nymphs, in the midst of the sheets of water flowing on all sides over rock-work of mother-of-pearl and coral.*

* A Siamese prince, rejoicing in the name of *Tan-oc-cun-srivi-saravacha*, who formed part of the Siamese embassy in 1684, thus speaks of this group, in a "letter to a friend:" — "Tu sais quel est le mortel que ce dieu représente: quant aux nymphes, si tu connaissais comme moi l'histoire secrète de la cour, tu comprendrais sans peine à la place de qui on les a mises là. Je ne trouvais pas d'abord que cela fut déraisonnable, parceque je pensais que la polygamie régnait en France comme à Siam."

It was in this retreat, lighted by a few illuminated shades, which cast a subdued warm light upon the groups of statuary and plashing water, that Gaudin awaited the marchioness. Nor was he long in expectation. Little time elapsed before Marie's step was heard upon the terrace, and she entered the grotto. Gaudin took her hand and led her to a seat. There was still no trace of emotion from the late terrible intelligence: her hand was cool, and her step equal and unfaltering. On the other hand, Sainte-Croix was pale and agitated: he might have felt less than the marchioness, but his outward demeanour was a clearer index to his feelings.

"Why do you not speak, Gaudin?" asked Marie, as her lover had remained some minutes in silence: "and you are pale as this cold marble! What has occurred?"

"It is the ghastly light of the lamp," said Gaudin. "I am well — quite well — could I be otherwise when all has prospered?"

"I will tell you what you are thinking of," returned the marchioness, as she riveted her basilisk eyes upon Sainte-Croix: "I should be but a poor enchantress if I could not read your inmost thoughts. It is the reaction of your spirit, Gaudin. The cord has been stretched too tightly, and it has broken; — you know that a fearful tie has now bound us to each other, and for the first time you feel that I am a clog upon your free actions."

"You are mistaken, Marie," replied Sainte-Croix with energy, although every word of the marchioness thrilled through him. "I may call Heaven to witness ——"

"Heaven!" exclaimed his companion, interrupting him, and clutching his arm with nervous force, as a sneer played over her beautiful lips, — "do not invoke that power again, Gaudin: what have we to do with Heaven now? I put as little faith in your protestations made before it, as you do in its testimony to your truth. — We are both without its pale," she added coldly.

"What can I say, then, that you will trust me? Is there any oath I can take that will give my asseverations weight with you, Marie? How will you believe me?"

Gaudin half knelt before her as he spoke, and the large

drops of agony stole over his brow. He saw that the marchioness was trying her power over him, now that they had been so fearfully bound to each other, — that she was playing with his feelings, until they could be broken, and rendered servilely subservient to her will.

"What oath will you have me take?" he continued, a he threw the whole intensity of his soul into every word. "Marie!—answer me, I implore you, — if not from love, from pity at what I have undergone. If you will not think of me as I believed you did, look on me as an animal that was in pain and suffering from an evil you had caused. What means this fearful revulsion of your feelings?"

He grasped her hands whilst he spoke, until the marchioness felt them as though they had been in a vice of hot iron. But she returned no answer. That fearful aggravation which woman can exert with such crushing power, — that frigid and apparently insensible demeanour, the colder in proportion as the heart she has drawn into her toils is anguished and convulsed, was driving Gaudin to distraction. "Marie!" he again cried, "do you not believe in the love which I bear for you?"

"It is not love, Sainte-Croix," at length she replied. "A *liaison* like ours has little love to nourish its continuance; passion and jealousy can be its only ties of endurance, and sooner or later it must end in misery. It is my turn now to say, — let us part, for ever."

"Part!" cried Gaudin rapidly, — "never! What fearful change has passed over your feelings? How can I assure you of my truth, Marie. Think on what I underwent for your sake in the gloomy cells of the Bastille. Look at me now — at your feet, so blindly, servilely in your power, that I could hate myself for such concession, had not my reason taken flight before your influence over me. Be satisfied with the crime — by committing which both our souls are lost — as a sufficient safeguard of our future attachment; if you will take no more human assurance. Believe in me, if not from truth, from mutual guilt, and reign my sole, adored one."

Subdued by his overcharged feelings, his head fell upon

the lap of the marchioness as he uttered the foregoing words with wild and impassioned energy, and he burst into tears. It is a strange sight, that, of a man weeping: and when Marie saw a man like Gaudin de Sainte-Croix thus overcome and at her feet, she was for the moment affected. But she returned no answer; and would have remained silent until her companion in guilt and passion again spoke, had not a sudden interruption diverted her attention. A short hurried moan, which, low as it was, teemed with anguish, sounding from the group of figures as though one of the statues had uttered it, caused her to start affrighted from the coral bank on which she was seated. Sainte-Croix also heard it even through his excitement, and started to his feet; whilst the marchioness rushed immediately behind the statues to discover the cause. There was another cry of alarm, and she returned leading forth Louise Gauthier. The girl had sought a retreat from the glare and tumult of the crowd within the grotto, previous to Sainte-Croix's arrival, and on his approach had retired behind the statues to conceal herself, imagining until he spoke, that he was some lounger who had entered merely from curiosity, and would soon depart.

The calm expression on the features of the marchioness for once gave way to a withering look of hate and jealousy. Gaudin started back, as the words "Louise Gauthier here!" burst almost involuntarily from his lips; and then, paralyzed by the sudden apparition of the trembling Languedocian, he remained silent.

The marchioness was the first to speak.

"So!" she exclaimed, quivering with emotion, in a voice almost stifled by her anger; "this was the reason that you named the grotto for a rendezvous, and it appears I came too soon. There — take your latest conquest — the servant of Madame Scarron. She is yours, — we meet no more."

With a glance of contempt at Louise, she threw her arm away, and, impelling her towards Sainte-Croix, was about to leave the grotto, when Louise caught hold of her robe and tried to draw her back.

"Stop, madame," she cried, "you are wrong. I was

here by accident, — on my soul, and by our Lady, this is the truth."

There was an earnestness of appeal in her voice that caused the marchioness to stop. And perhaps her asseveration might have derived additional force from the manner in which she called that power which the others dared not look to, to witness her sincerity.

"But you have met before," said Marie, after gazing at Louise for an instant with the strangest of expressions; "you know each other."

"It was long ago," replied Louise despondingly, as she looked at Sainte-Croix: "I would not have sought him; and yet, after what I have heard, — for not a syllable of your conversation has escaped me, — perhaps Providence sent me here, to save him — to save you both."

As she spoke she advanced towards Gaudin, and took his hand. There was no attempt on the part of the marchioness to stop her. Her curiosity was singularly roused as she watched the progress of this strange interview.

"Do not speak to me, Louise," exclaimed Sainte-Croix, with averted face, and struggling with his feelings. "Leave me, I beseech you."

"I am going to leave you, Gaudin," she replied; "and I shall never trouble you more. I did not willingly intrude upon you now, for I knew that all had long since passed away between us, — even the recollection of what once was. I am sorry that we have met."

"You have my thanks for this interposition, girl," said the marchioness, "for my eyes have been opened through it. — Monsieur de Sainte-Croix," she added coldly to Gaudin, "there is little confidence, it appears, between us. I should be sorry to come in upon an old attachment. This *lady* can still be yours."

"Heed her not, Marie," cried Sainte-Croix, after a powerful effort to master his feelings. I had no other motive in concealing this from you, than the wish to spare your feelings. Believe in me still. This has been madness — infatuation — call it what name you will, but you are the only one I ever loved."

And he advanced towards the marchioness; whilst Louise, pale as death, gasped forth hurriedly,

"This is indeed cruel; but even now you have yet to learn what woman can put up with from affection. You know your secrets are in my possession."

"You threaten us!" said Marie furiously.

"Far from it," replied the other: "I would save rather than destroy you. — Gaudin! I am ignorant what fearful influence has spell-bound your better feelings; but I know that such is not your nature. Have I the slightest power — discarded, heart-broken as I am — that can snatch you from these fearful toils?"

"Our absence will be remarked," observed the marchioness coldly to Sainte-Croix: "let us join the court."

"Hear me," cried Louise, seizing Gaudin's hand, "for the last time perhaps on earth — hear me, Gaudin. By the recollection of what we once were to each other, although you scorn me now; and the shadowy remembrance of old times, before these terrible circumstances, whatever they may be, had thus turned your heart from me, and from your God. There is still time to make amends for all that has occurred. I do not speak for myself, for all those feelings have passed; but for you alone. Repent, and be happy, — for happy now you are not."

Gaudin made no reply, but his bosom heaved rapidly, betraying his internal emotion. Once he turned towards Louise Gauthier, as if to speak: the words died on his tongue.

"This is idle talk," said the marchioness, as she drew Sainte-Croix to her side. "If you would not be taken for our accomplice, girl, you will keep silent as to what you have heard. Sainte-Croix, you are stupefied by this person's raving. Will you not come with me, Gaudin?"

She seized his hand, and, rapidly changing the tone of anger she had adopted to one of softness and affection, gazed tenderly at her lover, as her fair countenance resumed its tranquillity, and her eyes, beaming with gentleness and light, looked into Sainte-Croix's, with an expression that thrilled his very soul.

"Marie!" cried Gaudin faintly, "take me where you list. In life, or after it, — on earth or in hell, I am yours — yours only."

A flush of triumph passed over her face as she led Sainte-Croix from the grotto, leaving Louise Gauthier clinging to one of the statues for support, — so pale, that she might have been taken for another figure of the group, but for the violent emotion that agitated her slight and trembling frame.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE GASCON GOES THROUGH FIRE AND WATER TO ATTRACT ATTENTION. — THE BROTHER AND SISTER.

DURING the stormy interview we have just narrated, the festivities were proceeding with unflagging splendour. The repast in the Bosquet de la Salle de Bal had finished, and the company were now thronging along the Tapis Vert, towards the Bassin de Neptune, whereon some magnificent fireworks were to be displayed. Beyond this the canal was illuminated by coloured lights placed round its edge, and quivering in the water by reflection; and a number of small boats, similarly decorated, passed to and fro, until they were almost lost in the distance. A species of vast tent, open towards the water, had been erected at the extremity of the Tapis Vert for the reception of Louis and his court: the inferior guests, who were not supposed to be sensible of any difference of temperature, stood about upon the grass, wherever the best view of the *feu d'artifice* was to be obtained, — for to witness this portion of the fête the people were admitted to the gardens indiscriminately; the royal guard, however, forming a sufficient impregnable barrier to keep them from intruding too closely upon the presence of the monarch and his favourites.

Amongst the crowd was Jean Blacquart, who had

escaped from the abbé, and, having discovered Maître Picard, was pressing forward to obtain a front place, where his martial dress and gay ribbons could be seen to the best advantage, even at the risk of being pushed into the basin. Several of his old acquaintances were near him, — *bourgeoisie* of the Quartier Latin, and students at the schools. Amongst these latter Philippe Glazer had mounted on to one of the urns, which stood on pedestals surrounding the basin, for the double purpose of obtaining a better view of the exhibition, and addressing, from time to time, those amongst the crowd whom he knew, and a great many more whom he did not; and, as the court had not yet arrived, his verbal tournaments with such as he chose to joke with, or at, produced great mirth, amongst the bystanders.

"Maître Picard," cried Philippe, "take care of your feather; you are burning it against the lamp."

The little bourgeois, who was below, turned hurriedly round, and took off his hat to look at it. Of course nothing was the matter. The people began to laugh.

"Pardon, bourgeois," continued Philippe; "I mistook your red face for a flame, as it was reflected in your halberd. I forgot you had been used for a lamp yourself before now. Do you remember the '*lanterne*' in the Rue Mouffetard? I'm afraid the rain almost put you out."

"*Polisson!*" cried Maître Picard very angrily, as he recalled the adventure. "I shall trounce you and your graceless fellows yet. You will all come to the gallows."

"Of course we shall, — the day you are hung," replied Glazer. "You may count upon our attendance."

There was another burst of laughter from the bystanders, and Maître Picard waxed wrathful exceedingly. He turned the halberd upside down, and made a blow at Philippe with the long wooden handle of it. But the student, as he was perched upon the urn, caught up his sword in its scabbard, and warded off the blow, so that it was turned on one side, and the pikestaff descended with all its weight upon the head of Jean Blacquart, who was directly underneath, crushing his fine hat, and nearly sending him into the water.

"*Ohé messieurs!*" shouted Philippe, without giving the bourgeois time to recover himself. "The King! the King! He is coming to the pavilion."

"The King! the King!" echoed the people, imagining, from Glazer's elevated position, that he could see what was going on. Maître Picard immediately bustled through the crowd, and the mob pushing after him, effectually prevented him for the time from returning; which, however, he attempted to do as soon as he found the announcement was a false alarm.

"That was a spiteful blow, Blacquart, and, of course, done on purpose," continued Philippe to the Gascon, who was, with a rueful countenance, re-arranging his hat. "Maître Picard is jealous of you."

"The women certainly do come to the shop very often when I am sitting in the parlour," replied Jean, whose temper was smoothed at once by what he considered a compliment. "Madame Beauchesne, the young widow of the Rue Hautefeuille, is smitten, I am sure: but, betwixt ourselves, talks to Maître Picard as a cloak to her true sentiments. Mass! what a neck and shoulders she used to display!"

"And why does she not now, Jean?"

"*Pardieu!* the curé of Saint Etienne-du-Mont attacked her suddenly during mass, for going to church '*gorge découverte.*' He told her from the pulpit that such display was wrong, for priests were mortal after all. How the congregation shouted again with laughter!"

"I will swear that you are here to captivate some of the court ladies," continued Philippe.

"Nay, hardly that," replied the Gascon conceitedly, as he cocked his hat, and drew himself up as high as he could; "although I did fancy De Montespan eyed me as I stood by the door in the theatre. She has a goodly presence."

Glazer was about to make some reply, calculated to draw forth a fresh outpouring of Jean's Gascon conceit, when he was interrupted by a stranger, who advanced hastily towards the spot where Blacquart was standing, and at once addressed him. His dress was little suited to the festival.

He wore large riding-boots, which were dusty, as though he had just come from a journey. His dress, too, was disordered; his hair carelessly arranged; and his general appearance sufficiently marked to attract attention amongst the gay crowd about him, even in the semi-obscurity of the illumination.

"Are you on guard here, monsieur?" he said to Blacquart, scarcely noticing his eccentric accoutrements, which might have prevented him from asking the question.

Jean was flattered at being evidently taken for a real soldier. He boldly admitted at once that he was.

"Can you tell me if the Marchioness of Brinvilliers is at Versailles this evening?"

"She is," returned Jean. "I saw her arrive with Madame Scarron — De Maintenon, as they now call her. And not ten minutes back she crossed the Tapis Vert on the arm of M. Gaudin de Sainte-Croix."

The stranger uttered a subdued oath, as Blacquart pronounced the name.

"Which way were they going?" he asked quickly.

"Towards the pavilion," answered Jean. "I have no doubt you will find them there by this time."

The new comer returned no answer, but turning hastily away, passed on to the pavilion, which had been erected at the edge of the basin. It was hung with lamps, and he could discern the features of all the company who were assembled in it. His eye ran anxiously along the lines of plumed and jewelled head-dresses, until at last his glance fell upon Marie and Sainte-Croix, who were seated in a corner of the building near one of the entrances. He started slightly as he saw them; and then hurriedly tracing a few lines upon his tablets, he pointed the marchioness out to one of the pages, who were in waiting at the pavilion, and told him to give the message to her. The boy immediately obeyed his orders. As the marchioness read the note, her features underwent a rapid change; but the next instant they recovered their wonted unfathomable calmness; and, whispering a few words to Sainte-Croix, she rose from her seat, and left the pavilion. Gaudin

waited until she had quitted the building, and then, as if moved by a sudden impulse, followed her.

As she reached the outer entrance, she found the stranger waiting to receive her. It was her brother. She held out her hand to greet him; but he refused to take it, and retreating a step or two, raised his hat, as he received her with a cold salute.

"François!" exclaimed the marchioness; "what brings you here! Has anything happened to our father? Tell me!"

"He is *dead*, Marie!" replied her brother, with a solemn earnestness, that would have shivered the feelings of any other human being but the one he addressed. "I have left the body not an hour and a half ago, to bring you the intelligence in the midst of the heartless glitter of Versailles."

"Dead!" repeated the marchioness, feigning the same surprise with which she had received the self-same words from Sainte-Croix such a short time previously. "Dead! and I was not there!"

"No, Marie!" returned François d'Aubray; "and I come to find you at Versailles — in this licentious court, not with females in whom you might have confided your reputation, after what has already occurred; but with the man by whose wretched acquaintance with you the last days of your father's life were poisoned."

Marie started at the words: could it be possible that the cause of death was suspected?

"Ay, poisoned," continued her brother, "as fatally as though real venom had been used, instead of this abandoned heartlessness."

The marchioness breathed again.

"To whom do you refer?" she asked coldly.

"To Monsieur de Sainte-Croix," replied her brother.

"Who is here to answer any charge you may have to make against him, monsieur," interrupted Gaudin, who just now joined the party.

"You shall have the opportunity afforded you, monsieur," replied François d'Aubray: "but this is neither the time

nor the place. — Marie, you will return with me immediately to Paris."

"With you, François?"

"This instant! I have your father's dying words yet echoing in my brain, committing you to *our* care. Are you ready?"

"Surely the Marchioness de Brinvilliers is her own mistress?" observed Gaudin, scarcely knowing how to act.

"She will obey me, monsieur," replied the other. "Come, Marie; you know me."

As he spoke, he seized his sister's arm, and bowing to Sainte-Croix, drew her away.

"You still live in the Place Maubert, I believe," he continued: "you will receive a message from me in the morning. *Viens!*"

He spoke in a tone of authority that Marie felt was only to be disputed by an instant encounter between François and Sainte-Croix, where they were then standing. So, throwing an expression full of intense meaning to Gaudin, she allowed her brother to lead her along the Tapis Vert, towards the entrance of the palace. Gaudin saw them depart, and then going to the stables, had his horse re-saddled, and rode at a desperate pace back to Paris, passing the *calèche* in which the marchioness had been placed by her brother on the road.

Meanwhile, the King and his immediate suite had arrived at the pavilion, and the fireworks were about to commence. Water-serpents and floating pieces of fire were already whizzing and spinning about on the surface of the basin; and one or two men had crossed the water from the opposite side of the fountain to the well-known group, where they were arranging the cases for the grand bouquet. Philippe saw this from his perch upon the urn, and determined to turn the Gascon's vanity to some account.

"Your dress is really very handsome, Jean," he observed. "It is a pity that its beauty is lost in the mob."

"I think so myself, indeed," replied Blacquart; "but I have been allowed no opportunity of showing it off. At

court everything goes by interest; and — hem! — I can excuse a little jealousy on the part of the Garde Royale."

"Now, if they will let you light the *feu d'artifice*," said Philippe, "you will be seen by everybody."

"But how can I get to do it?" asked Blacquart.

"Come with me," said Glazer.

And tumbling from his post, purposely, on the head of Maître Picard, who had returned to his position, he shot amongst the crowd, before the bourgeois could contrive to aim another blow at him, and, followed by Jean, got to the other side of the fountain. Here he claimed acquaintance with one of the artificers, who, it appeared, had been under his care at the Hôtel Dieu with an accident; and, by his interest, Jean was furnished with a link, and directed what to do, being inducted into the group along a slight temporary bridge of boards.

In the interim before the grand piece was lighted, Jean arranged and re-arranged his cloak and hat a hundred times; and when at last he applied the light to the quick-match, and the horses began to blow out fire from their nostrils, apparently in the centre of the water, and the points of Neptune's trident also went off in a brilliant discharge of sparks, Jean was in ecstasies. The people applauded; all of which he took to himself, and would even have bowed in return to them, had not the presence of the King restrained him. But he felt satisfied that, in the glare of the fire, he was plainly visible to all, and this for the time consoled him.

But his evil genius was about to triumph. A number of changes had taken place in the bouquet, when suddenly, and simultaneously from every point of the statues, a column of fire shot up high in the air, and fell again in a shower of flame upon the group, threatening to exterminate the Gascon in its descent. His first impulse was to retreat to the planks, and get to the edge of the basin; but a formidable blazing wheel, forming the back-work of the entire piece, cut off his flight, so that he was driven back again. Thicker and thicker fell the flakes, as the tawdry dabs of lace which hung about his dress caught fire; and his thin, half-starved feather, which gained in height what

it lost in substance, also took light. Philippe Glazer, who had foreseen all this, set up a loud huzza, in which those near him joined: the remainder fancied that the figure of the Gascon, as he danced amidst the glowing shower, was a part of the exhibition, and intended to represent one of the allegorical personages who always figured in the masques and tableaux of the period. But at last, he could bear it no longer. His cloak was just bursting into a flame, when, in the agony of his despair, he threw himself into the basin, amidst the renewed hilarity of the spectators, including Louis himself, who, with La Montespan, and even the pale pensive La Vallière, was more amused than if everything had gone on in its proper way.

The reservoir was not very deep, but the Gascon had lost all self-possession, and he floundered about like a water-god, to the great detriment of so much of finery as yet remained, until he got near enough to the edge of the basin for Maître Picard to hook him out with his halberd, and drag him half-drowned and half-roasted to dry ground.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RUE DE L'HIRONDELLE.

On the southern bank of the Seine, touching the water-boundary of the Quartier Latin, and running parallel with the river from the Place du Pont St. Michel, which is situated at the foot of the bridge from which it takes its name, there is a dark and noisome street, bordered by tall gloomy houses, and so narrow in its thoroughfare, that the inhabitants on either side of the way can all but shake hands with each other across the footway — for carriages could not pass. It is called — for it exists in all its pristine squalor and wretchedness at the present day — the Rue de l'Hirondelle. The pure air can scarcely penetrate to its reeking precincts; the way is choked up with offal, and things flung from the houses to decay in the streets. The houses are tenanted by the lowest orders, and the dirt of

ages has been suffered to accumulate on the walls and passages: in fact, it bears some resemblance to the miserable portion of the "Rookery" still left in London; with the exception, that this Rue de l'Hirondelle is narrower and darker. Gloomy at all times, yet at night the thinly scattered lamps scarcely illuminate its entrance; and he would be a bold man, indeed, who chose to pass along it alone. And in the seventeenth century, before the introduction of street-lights, when the poverty of its inhabitants would not allow them to place lanterns before their doors, it was always in total darkness, even when bright moonlight fell upon the quays and open places.

It was the evening of the funeral of M. d'Aubray, the father. The night was stormy, and the wind howled over the city, as if bearing on its wings the spirit's wailing for the dead, and crying for retribution. Few cared to be abroad: the few lamps had been extinguished after struggling against the blast, and were not relighted; and one window only in the Rue de l'Hirondelle gave token that the houses were inhabited.

In a miserable room of one of the worst-conditioned houses—so ruinous in its appearance, that large black beams crossed the street from its front to the opposite side of the narrow street, to prop it up from falling and crushing those who might be below,—there were two persons seated at a small fire. In one of them, any person who had once seen him could have recognised the Italian Exili, although his imprisonment had left traces of its privations upon his face. His features were more wan: his hair was grizzled, and his eyes had sunk yet deeper, glaring from the bottom of the orbits with riveting intensity. His companion was dressed in a fantastic costume of old black velvet, with a capuchin cowl, which, when worn over his head, nearly concealed his face, and his head was now buried in it,—less, however, for privacy, than to shield himself from the cold draughts of air that poured in through the broken, ill-fitted windows. On a rough table before him were pieces of money, of all degrees of value: and these he was counting, as he put them away in a box heavily clasped with iron.

"Sorcery is still thriving," said the latter personage, "and we have had a good day. Here are twelve pistoles from the Demoiselle La Varenne, who came to-day suspicious of her new patron, M. Chanralon, the Archbishop of Paris. He has taken up with the Marchioness de Gourville."

"The sister of the *maréchal?*" asked Exili.

"The same. Ho! ho! ours is a brave court!" continued the other with a derisive laugh. "Better be magician than superintendent at the Gobelins. Here is a piece of gold from the same *clique*. Pierre-Pont, the lieutenant of the Gardes-du-corps, is crazy with jealousy for La Varenne. He came to-day for a philtre: he will come for poison next."

"Hush!" exclaimed Exili: "the very echoes linger about these walls to repeat themselves to the next comers. I find liberty too sweet to run the chance of another sojourn in the Bastille, where Sainte-Croix would too gladly see me — curses wither him!"

"He will be here to-night," replied Lachaussée — for such was Exili's companion — "to have his wound dressed. M. François d'Aubray is an expert swordsman, and the captain found his match on the Terrain last night."

The ex-superintendent alluded to a duel which had been fought on the preceding night on a lonely piece of waste ground behind Notre Dame, frequently chosen for such engagements from the facility of escape which the river on all sides afforded. Gaudin had met the brother of the marchioness — the *suites* of the rencontre at Versailles, — and had been wounded. He had taken Lachaussée with him as an attendant; for that person, since the affair in the catacombs of the Bièvre, had been leading but a sorry life during Gaudin's imprisonment, and was now assisting Exili in professing the art and mystery of a sorcerer. The cause of the Italian's release from the Bastille was never publicly stated, though many knew it. Threatened revelations, which would deeply have affected those high in position in Paris, procured his discharge within a few days of Sainte-Croix's liberation; and once more thrown upon the world of the great city, he had, under his old

cloak of an alchemist, set up for a magician. He had encountered Lachaussée ready to assist him, or to avail himself, in fact, of any chance of livelihood that might turn up; and linked together as they, in a measure, were, by the affair of the Croce Bianca at Milan, had become trusty partners; for the bondages of crime, despite the evil natures of the allies, are firmer than those of honour and friendship. Exili, with the deeply-vindictive and unforgiving disposition of his countrymen, desired only to be revenged upon Gaudin for his arrest and confinement; and Lachaussée, knowing that he was in the power of Sainte-Croix, as long as the letter announcing the crime at Milan was in his possession, was equally anxious for his downfal. More than once he had counselled Exili to instil some poison into the wound as he dressed it, that might have induced an agonizing death. But the Italian patiently awaited his time to pounce, as an eagle would have done, upon his prey. He wished to play with his victim, secretly sure that he would eventually fall miserably, through his agency — and not alone.

"Twenty crowns more," said Lachaussée, as he swept the remaining pieces of coin into the chest, "and that from the armourer's wife of the Place Dauphin to show her the devil! It is lucky her courage did not fail her until after she had paid her money. We should else have been terribly put to our wits to exhibit his highness."

"Unless our interest with M. de Sainte-Croix could have produced Madame de Brinvilliers," answered Exili, as a ghastly smile flitted over his sallow countenance — a dull and transient sunbeam playing upon the face of a corpse.

"And we shall have more money still," said Lachaussée, taking no notice of Exili's speech. "I know two customers who will come after curfew this evening. Witchcraft is flourishing."

"The infernal powers grant that it may not turn round upon us," said Exili. "Recollect, within four days of each other, that César and Ruggieri were both strangled by the devil — at least, so goes the story."

"The solution is easy," returned Lachaussée. "They boasted of favours granted by the great ladies of the court: 'tis a dangerous game to play."

"At all events, the fall of Urban Grandier was mortal. I have no wish to be roasted alive like him. Hist! I hear some one coming up to our room."

A mastiff who had been reposing silently at Exili's feet, having a strange contrivance fastened on to its head, in the manner of a mask, and representing a demon's face, in order that the vulgar might take it for his familiar spirit, uttered a low growl: and the sound of approaching footsteps, stumbling up the rugged staircase of the house, was plainly audible. The next moment Gaudin de Sainte-Croix knocked at the door, and was admitted to the apartment.

"Your unguent has marvellous powers of healing," he said to Exili, after the first salutations. "I am already cured, although the wound had an ugly look."

"I could have put the hurt beyond any leech's skill to cure, by anointing the blade with some pomander of my own make," said Exili. "It would send such venom through the veins, as soon as it pierced them, that human aid would be of little avail. Your wasp stung you smartly as it was; but you see I cured you."

"Unlike the wasp," said Sainte-Croix, "he still retains his sting about him."

"Then render it powerless," replied Exili, fixing his eyes steadfastly on him. "You can do it: more obnoxious insects than François d'Aubray have fallen by our means. The earth has this day enfolded one in its cold dark shroud — the deed and the victim are hidden together."

"A second would excite suspicion," replied Gaudin, perceiving the drift of his words.

"A second, and a third, and a twentieth might pass away with equal secresy," returned Exili. "Look you, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix, — when men have played with life and death as we have done, even to the perdition, the utter, hopeless ruin of their souls, in whatever state may follow this short fever of worldly existence, — when the triumph of the hour that passes is all our passions crave,

and the purity of that which has gone, the misery of the time which is to come, are alike spurned from consideration and forgotten in the wild and heedless recklessness of the present,—in this position they should have no secrets: all should be in common between them."

"I have kept nothing from you," said Gaudin.

"I do not say you have," continued Exili; "it is to the effusion of my own most hidden knowledge I allude. All that this great city holds of rank, beauty, and power are my slaves. I give the succession to the thirsting profligate, or remove the bar that keeps the panting lover from his idol. These fools and butterflies come to seek me as they would a mere drug-vendor, and little think of what I may have in store for them. There is not one particle of the venom in their crystal drinks which I cannot call back to its tangible state; and when I die, I shall leave the process of the tests behind me, to confound the latest poisoners. But until then, as chemical art at present stands, the traces are inscrutable. Your way is open before you."

As Exili finished speaking, he turned on one side as if to overlook the contents of a small retort that was bubbling over a spirit-lamp at his side; but his gaze was still directed towards Sainte-Croix.

"You would have me send this François d'Aubray to join his father?" said Gaudin, after a minute's pause.

"He is coming here this evening," observed Lachaussée, "and ought to have been here before this."

"You have not given him any of the Aqua Tofana?" asked Gaudin, with a look of alarm.

"Calm yourself, *mon capitaine*," replied Exili with a sneer. "He will not come for poison, but a philtre; and that not for love, but against it. He does not fear the glance of an evil eye: he wishes to turn aside the magic of a fond one."

Those high in position in Paris at this epoch, no less than the humblest and least instructed inhabitants of the city, were accustomed to place the blindest confidence in the predictions and potions of the various fortune-tellers and empirics with whom Paris swarmed, under the names

of alchemists, magicians, and Bohemians. The court set the example of belief; and the common people, ever ready to imitate its follies, readily fell into the same superstition. Links in the chain of the wonderful system of espionage which ran through the entire population, — the universal corruption of all classes, especially valets, mistresses, and confessors, which Richelieu had effected, — the astrologers gleaned important information respecting the inhabitants, which they were ever ready to place at the disposal of the best paymaster. The higher orders sought them eagerly, paying them as long as they served a purpose; but, when this was over, a *lettre de cachet* consigned them to the Bastille, and they were generally found strangled in their cells, the murder being attributed invariably to the devil.

"Hark!" said Lachaussée, whose ear had been on the alert to catch the slightest sound; "I can hear some one approaching."

"It should be Monsieur d'Aubray," replied Exili. "He must not see you here, however," he continued, addressing Sainte-Croix. "Step within this cabinet, and you will doubtless find out the feelings of his family towards you."

Gaudin caught up his hat and sword, and had scarcely concealed himself, when the brother of the Marchioness of Brinvilliers entered the apartment.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MISCHIEF STILL THICKENS ON ALL SIDES.

HURRIEDLY as François d'Aubray ascended the staircase, yet the others found time to receive him with due effect. Gaudin retreated within the lumbering piece of furniture that took up half one side of the room; Exili resumed his attitude of attention to the chemical preparations going on; and Lachaussée, burying his features still deeper in his capauchin cowl, hastily lighted a rude lamp, standing on a

tripod near the table, which, trimmed with some medicated spirit, burnt with a ghastly flame that threw a cadaverous and almost unearthly light upon the countenances of those who turned their faces towards it.

"I am before my time," said François, as he entered the room; "it yet wants a good half hour to curfew."

"We are at your service," replied Exili; "my assistant told me we might expect you, Monsieur d'Aubray."

"You know me, then!" exclaimed the other with surprise.

"No more than I am acquainted with every one else who comes to seek my aid," answered the physician calmly. "I should lay small claim to my title of astrologer, if I could not divine the position or desires of my clients."

"Then you know my business here this evening?"

"Part has been told me," said Exili; "part, and the most important, I can read here."

From a small china cup he took some noisome black unguent, with which he smeared his hands, and held them in the light of the coloured flame. Then tracing (or pretending to do so) certain things delineated on the compound, he continued,

"I see Notre Dame by night, and a duel being fought on the Terrain, between yourself and one they call Gaudin de Sainte-Croix. You wound him: he leaves with his *témoin* in a boat, and you return to the Hôtel d'Aubray."

"Well?" asked François, eagerly gazing at Exili with breathless attention.

"Well," echoed the physician, "your sister, Madame de Brinvilliers, is awaiting your return. You have words together; and she is determined not to give up her lover, your late antagonist."

"Is that known also?" asked François in a tone of mortification.

"More by common report than by magic," said Exili. "Walk on the quays and carrefours and listen to what the people say, if you doubt me."

"Go on—go on," exclaimed the other.

"I see no more," replied the physician; "all else has been told me by mortal lips. You wish to stop this *liaison*,

without totally crushing your sister together with it. Is it not so?"

"You are correct. I do not wish Madame de Brinvilliers to fall so utterly; but Sainte-Croix's influence with her must be put an end to."

"The means are simple," replied Exili.

"I know what you would say," interrupted D'Aubray; "you would have me exercise the most cursed power you have at your command, that of poison. No, physician, I am no murderer. If I meet Sainte-Croix again in fair fight, I might deal less gently with him; but if he fell, it should be in equal combat."

"You spoke too hurriedly," continued Exili. "I would suggest the glance of an evil eye, or some philtre that might draw his affections away, and disgust his present mistress. Here is such a one, unless you would have him blighted by my glance."

He fixed his eyes upon D'Aubray with such a terrible expression, that François firmly believed the power rested in them which he vaunted. He returned no answer, but stretched out his hand for the small phial that Exili held towards him.

"Now, seek the fairest *dame galante* that you can find, who would have an officer of the Normandy cavalry for her lover, and bid her drink it—fearlessly, for it is harmless. Gaudin de Sainte-Croix will be in her toils from that instant. The whirlpool of passion will drag him round faster and faster in its eddies, until he is lost; for in perdition alone can an attachment formed on passion end."

"Is there any one above another to whom I should give the draught?" asked D'Aubray.

"'Tis immaterial," replied Exili; "there is no lack of such beauties at present in our gay city. Seek, if to-morrow be fine, and you will find a score upon the Pont Neuf to serve your turn. If not, Marotte Dupré, La Duménil, La Varenne—pshaw! even Montespan herself, in all the plumage of her last triumph, if you choose to fly at such high game."

D'Aubray placed some pieces of gold on the table, and

rose to depart, taking the potion with him. Exili also got up from the seat at the same time, as he said,

"Stay; let me light you down. The stairs are old and crumbling, and the passage obscure."

He took the lamp from the table, and, preceding his guest, led the way down the staircase. As they reached the street-door, he said hurriedly to D'Aubray,

"Your hatred of Sainte-Croix cannot be deadlier, fiercer than my own. Be satisfied with knowing that, should the philtre fail, his days are numbered."

He watched the retreating form of François D'Aubray until it was lost in the obscurity of the Rue de l'Hirondelle, and then returned back to his apartment.

Sainte-Croix had emerged from his place of concealment, and was now conversing with Lachaussée. Their talk ceased suddenly as Exili entered; but there was an air of excitement about both, as though they had been engaged in a warm, though brief, argument. Gaudin's face was flushed, his brow knit, and his breathing forcible and hurried; whilst Lachaussée was compressing his under lip forcibly against his teeth, as he caressed the mastiff with his foot, merely, however, with the pretence of doing something, for his eye was fixed on Sainte-Croix with no very bland expression.

The quick glance of Exili detected that they had been interrupted in some earnest conversation. He, however, took no notice of it. Sainte-Croix took his departure as soon as he imagined François D'Aubray was out of the way; and Exili extinguished the fire in his small furnace, and also prepared to leave the room.

"I shall go to rest," he said to his assistant. "The only other visitor we expect to-night will be content with your augury. See that he pays, however; and, after you have got all you can by agreement, see what else can be wrung from him by fear."

He gathered a few articles together, and left the chamber, proceeding to the one immediately over it, where his slow and measured tread could soon be heard pacing the old and ill-secured floor ere he retired to bed.

Lachaussée remained for a few minutes after he left in

deep reflection, from which he was aroused by the sound of the curfew, as the adjacent bell of Notre Dame, on the other side the left branch of the Seine, swung its booming echoes over the dreary precincts of the Rue de l'Hirondelle. It had not ceased when the restless manner of the mastiff betokened the arrival of another stranger. A growl was followed by a deep hoarse bark, and the beast rose from his crouching position at the feet of Lachaussée, and shambled round the room with the gait of some huge wild animal; his strange head-gear giving him the appearance in the obscurity of a superhuman monster. At a word from Lachaussée the mastiff returned and resumed his place; and, after a blundering noise up the staircase, mingled with a few oaths from the new comer, the door opened, and no less a personage entered the room than honest Benoit, the master of the mill-boat at the Pont Notre Dame.

Lachaussée pulled his cowl closer over his head than ever as the visitor advanced, apparently in great awe, and making numberless obeisances as he approached.

"You made an appointment here this evening," said Lachaussée in a feigned voice, "touching some theft committed at your mill."

"I did, most infernal seigneur," replied Benoit, searching for some term of appropriate respect. "That is—my wife, Monsieur—Monseigneur—Bathilde would have me come, and never let me have any rest until I did, though she is not often so fidgety."

"And what does she want to know?"

"Mass! she told me to ask more things than I can recollect, when she found I had made up my mind to come. Woman's curiosity, Monsieur—nothing more. She would have known who the young gallant is that spends all his time talking to the pretty wife of Pierre Huchet when he is on guard as a good bourgeois;—and why the Veuve Boidart always goes to mass at St. Jacques la Boucherie, living, as she does, in the Rue de la Harpe;—and if it was the students or the Bohemians, or both together, who stole the gilded weathercock from our mill-boat, which was given to me by Monsieur le Rouge, and

belonged to the *tourelle* of the Grand Chatelet that tumbled down the other day."

"You had better look for it amongst the scholars of Mazarin and Cluny, than in the Cours des Miracles," replied Lachaussée. "But this is not all?"

"She—in fact, I may say *we*," continued Benoit, "were most anxious to know what has become of a fellow-countrywoman, one Louise Gauthier, who has, we fear, fallen into bad hands. She was living with Madame Scarron, but has not been heard of since the fête at Versailles."

"What fee can you pay to learn?" asked Lachaussée. "At this season the rulers of the planets require to be propitiated, and the sacrifices are expensive."

"There are two good livres," said Benoit, laying the pieces down on the table. "You should have more if I had earned them; but times are bad for us poor work-people."

"You have no more than this?" inquired Lachaussée.

"Not a sou; and Bathilde will have to go without her lace cap against her fête-day as it is. If I had more I would give it to you, so long as you tell me of Louise Gauthier."

Lachaussée perceived the Languedocian spoke honestly. Convinced that he saw the extent of his wealth before him, he made some preparations for his pretended incantation; and, taking a bottle of spirit from Exili's table, he poured it on the expiring flame in the tripod, which was leaping up in intermittent flashes, as if about to go out altogether.

But, as he bent over the lamp, in the carelessness of the moment he used more of the medicated alcohol than was needed. It fired up, and, catching the vapour from the bottle, communicated with the contents, causing the flask to explode violently. Lachaussée started back, as a cloud of flame rose almost in his face. As it was, it laid hold of his cowl, which was immediately on fire. Heedless of being on his guard, in the fright and danger of the moment he threw it off, and his well-known features met the astonished gaze of Benoit, who was in no less a state of

alarm than the pretended sorcerer. But, as he recognised the ex-superintendent of the Gobelins, his common sense came back in great strength, to the discomfiture of his belief in the supernatural. The alarm finished with the explosion; but Benoit immediately exclaimed,—

"I think we have met before—in the catacombs of the Bièvre!"

Lachaussée had been so taken by surprise, that for a few seconds he made no reply; whilst Benoit's fingers were working as though he clutched an imaginary stick, and intended to use it. All his respect for the magician had vanished in his desire to chastise Lachaussée.

"Concealment is no longer needful," at length he observed.

"Not at all," said Benoit, as he swept the pieces of money from the table, and put them in his pocket again. "I know now how it was you were not drowned in the Bièvre: we shall see you on the gibbet yet. 'Tis a pity your horoscopes did not foretel this bad chance. I wish you good-b'ye."

"Hold!" cried Lachaussée, as Benoit advanced to the door:—"you go not so easily—we must understand each other first."

"It will not take long to do that," replied the Languedocian. "My arms can speak pretty plainly when they are needed."

"And so can this," exclaimed the other, as he took down a cumbrous old pistol fitted with a snap-haunce, and presented it at the Languedocian. "Now—you are unarmed, and the odds are against you. We must have a compact before you leave."

Benoit retreated before the fire-arm, as though intimidated, until he reached the window; this he dashed open with his fist, and then commenced calling for the watch with all his might. In an instant Lachaussée raised the pistol, and discharged its contents. But the snap-haunce was comparatively a clumsy contrivance; it hung a second upon being released: and Benoit, perceiving the object of the other, suddenly stooped, so that the charge, whatever

it was, passed over his head and through the window, shattering the casement on the other side of the street.

"A miss again!" cried Benoit, jumping upright. "Bras d'Acier himself took no better aim in the catacombs. *Au secours! aux voleurs!* Now, then, Monsieur Lachaussée, look out for yourself. Here comes the Guet Royal, or I am mistaken."

And indeed, as he spoke, the lanterns of the watch were discernible coming round the street, attracted by the lusty lungs of Benoit. Lachaussée muttered an imprecation as he advanced to the window, and observed them coming closer to the door. Not caring to be given into custody, and perceiving that he could not escape by the street, he hurriedly left the room, closing the door after him, and Benoit heard him going up stairs. The mastiff would, in all probability, have fastened upon the Languedocian, as he kept growling in a crouching position, as though preparing to spring; but the contrivance fastened about his head so effectually muzzled him, that Benoit was under no apprehensions.

"*Ohe! Messieurs!*" he shouted; "come on, or the bird will have flown. Look out for the roof, as well as the door. He is an active fellow, but no sorcerer. You see his familiars will not release him."

As he spoke, a cry from the guard below called Benoit's attention to the direction in which they were gazing. We have stated that the Rue de l'Hirondelle was crossed by several large black beams, from the houses on one side of the way to those on the other, that the ruinous buildings might not fall upon the heads of the passers by. As Benoit looked up, he perceived that Lachaussée had emerged from one of the windows of the floor above, and at his imminent peril was clinging to the beam, and traversing it as he best might, to reach the house opposite. But, narrow as the thoroughfare was, before he had half crossed it, Benoit had crept out of the window from which he had called the watch, on to another of the supports below the one chosen by Lachaussée, and, telling the guard to withhold their fire, was in pursuit of his old acquaintance. The soldiers paused to watch the strange

chase, and gave a cry of admiration as Benoit, clutching the timber above him, by a violent effort, swung himself up to the beam by which the other was endeavouring to escape.

It was a moment of keen anxiety. They were both afraid of letting go their hold, which was so treacherous, that the least change in their position would have caused them to overbalance themselves, and tumble down into the street; and so they remained for some minutes, watching each other like two fencers, to be in readiness for any attack the other was about to make. At length Lachaussée made a creeping movement in advance; when Benoit, whose mountebank engagements had given him a certain kind of gymnastic superiority, trusting to his knees to keep him from falling, caught hold of Lachaussée by the legs. But he lost his equilibrium in so doing; and, after wavering for an instant as if in uncertainty, he fell on one side of the beam, — still, however, keeping hold of the other, who was now driven to support both himself and Benoit by his arms, half hanging from, half leaning over, the timber.

"Look out, *mes braves*," gasped the Languedocian, "and catch us. Our friend won't hold long. — No, no," he continued, as Lachaussée, struggling, tried to free himself from the grip, "you don't shake me off. I will stick to you like the hangman will some day. — Come under, and hold your scarves."

The guards were quick in taking the hint. Not a quarter of a minute had passed before they had pulled off their scarves, and some ten or a dozen standing in a circle laid hold of the different ends, pulling them tight, so as to form a sort of net-work, as they stood in a ring directly beneath Benoit.

In vain Lachaussée tried to get away. Every struggle expended what strength he had remaining, until, unable any longer to cling to the beam, he fell, and Benoit with him. They came heavily down, pulling one or two of the watch to the ground; but the scarves broke their fall of some twelve feet, and the next moment Benoit was on his legs, whilst Lachaussée found himself in the custody

of the guard, at the head of which he perceived Sainte-Croix. Gaudin had fallen in with the patrol soon after leaving the house of Exili, and, knowing the Chevalier du Guet for the night, had sauntered on in conversation with him at the head of the watch, until they had been attracted to the Rue de l'Hirondelle by Benoit's cries for assistance.

"To the lock-up with such a gallows-bird!" cried Benoit. "I can tell you as much about him as will last until to-morrow morning. Guard him well, or the devil will strangle him in the night, as he did the other sorcerers."

The officer directed his party to move on, guarding Lachaussée between them, whilst Benoit brought up the rear. As they started from the Rue de l'Hirondelle he looked up to the house they had just quitted, and saw Exili's vulture face peering from one of the windows at the tumult; but of this he took no notice.

On the way to the guard-house Gaudin approached Lachaussée, at a signal from the latter.

"You can free me if you choose," said the superintendent shortly.

"I shall not interfere in the matter," replied Sainte-Croix. "Only be satisfied that you are not a prisoner by *my* agency."

"If you refuse to liberate me," returned the other, "the earth may tell some strange secrets, that you would not care should be known."

"What do you mean, cur?" said Gaudin, contemptuously.

"Civil words, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix," answered Lachaussée. "We have chemical compounds that, in the event of M. Dreux D'Aubray's body being exhumed, would bring every atom of his last beverage to its simple elements. Do you understand? There cannot be so much difficulty as you imagine in procuring my liberation."

"Silence!" returned Gaudin in a low quick voice; "silence, or we shall be overheard."

"But my freedom!" continued Lachaussée in a loud tone.

"Wait until we get to the guard-house," said Sainte-Croix, as he passed on, and was once more at the side of the Chevalier du Guet.

They passed on through some of the narrow tortuous streets that lie towards the water boundary of the Quartier Latin, and at last arrived at a guard-house in the vicinity of the Hôtel Dieu. Gaudin spoke a few words to the captain of the watch aside, which the other appeared to agree with: they were evidently companions as well as acquaintances.

"There is some mistake here," said Sainte-Croix, "I see now the prisoner you have captured is my valet. He has been lunatic enough to go and consult some predicting varlet, and met this other simple fellow. They have had a brawl between them; and whoever first called the guard would have given the other into custody."

"*Pardieu!*" said Benoit, "you great seigneurs have different notions of a brawl to us artizans. I suppose, if his snap-haunce had put me beyond Master Glazer's skill, who can cure anything, you would have thought lightly of it."

"Silence! common person!" said the captain.

"I *will* speak," said Benoit, who began to be very angry at this unexpected turn that things were taking; "and I am not a common person. Ask Monsieur Sainte-Croix if he found me so when we met one night at the corner of the Rue Neuve St. Paul. I believe that all the Bohemians and the great folks in Paris are so leagued together, that they are afraid of one another, and the people receive all the buffets of their disagreeings. The man Lachaussée there is an inhabitant of all the *cours des miracles* in Paris. I know him, I tell you."

"You are at liberty, fellow; you can depart," said the officer.

"Liberty, forsooth!" continued Benoit, with increased excitement. "Why, I have never been arrested. I am the accuser; and M. de Sainte-Croix knows that Lachaussée is no more—"

At a motion from the captain of the watch, two of the guard seized Benoit whilst he was thus pouring out his anger, and, without allowing him to finish his speech, very unceremoniously turned him out of the guard-house, and half-drove, half-walked him to the end of the street, where they left him to go home to the boat-mill, vowing that he would still be even with all of them.

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CHAPTER XX.

TWO GREAT VILLAINS.

MEANWHILE, things being thus arranged, Sainte-Croix and Lachaussée left the guard, and proceeded to the Rue des Bernardins, where Gaudin still resided. On arriving at his chamber, whither they passed unnoticed, Gaudin complained of cold; and, in effect, the evening was damp and chilly. At his wish, the other fanned the embers of the fire-place into a flame with his hat, and his so-called master then produced a flask of wine, which he placed on the table, with some glasses.

"There is some of the best hock," said he, "that the Rhine ever produced. Drink; you need some wine after your late adventure. Fear not a long draught — a cask of it would not hurt you."

"You will drink with me?" asked Lachaussée as Sainte-Croix filled a glass for his companion, and then replaced the bottle on the table.

"Not now," replied Gaudin. "I have to play to-night, and must keep my head cool. A little water will quench my thirst."

"Here's to our renewed acquaintanceship, then, *mon capitaine*," said Lachaussée, as he raised the glass. But before touching its contents with his lips, as if struck by some sudden thought, he held the glass between his eyes and the lamp, and then, replacing it on the table, took a small set of tablets from his pocket, and pulled from them a leaf of white paper.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Sainte-Croix.

"Nothing," replied Lachaussée, "beyond using a common precaution in these treacherous times. I do not mistrust you; but you know not who is about you."

As he was speaking, he dipped the slip of paper into the wine. The effect was instantaneous — the white was changed to a bright scarlet. Sainte-Croix uttered a feigned exclamation of surprise.

"Poison!" he cried, as he saw the change.

"Ay, poison," repeated Lachaussée calmly. "Did I not well before I drank? It was doubtless intended for you, Monsieur Gaudin. Your cups are evidently not of Venice glass, or they would have shivered at its contact."

"This shall be looked into," said Gaudin, as he threw the remainder into the fire-place, "and closely. But, at present, to business."

"Ay, to business," answered the other, as a most sinister smile passed across his otherwise ill-favoured countenance — the result of what had just occurred.

"I have something to propose to you," said Gaudin, "if you feel inclined to join me in the venture. We have worked together before, and you know me."

"I do," answered Lachaussée, with meaning emphasis, as he glanced at the drinking-glass. "We can both be trusted to the same extent, for we are in each other's hands."

"You allude to Milan," observed Sainte-Croix.

"No," replied the other, coldly; "to the château of M. D'Aubray at Offemont."

"A truce to this recrmination," said Gaudin. "Hear what I have to say. M. D'Aubray is dead — how, it matters not — and buried. One hundred and fifty thousand livres were to have been the legacy to his daughter, Madame de Brinvilliers, and, what was perhaps more, her absolute freedom to act as she pleased. The money has passed to her brothers, in trust for her, and she is entirely under their surveillance. This must be altered."

"And you would have me assist you?"

"On consideration of paying you one-fifth of whatever possessions might fall to the marchioness thereupon. Do you agree to this?"

"Go on," was Lachaussée's reply, "and tell me the means."

"Ay — the means — there lies the difficulty," said Sainte-Croix. "What think you of?"

There was a minute of silence, as they regarded each other with fixed intensity, waiting for the suggestion. Plunged as they were in the dregs of crime, they hesitated to unfold their plan, although they knew there was but one scheme intended. Lachaussée was the first who spoke.

"Diseases are hereditary," said he. "The present lieutenant-civil, and his brother the councillor, might follow their father to the cemetery, which keeps the secrets of its occupants even better than the Bastille."

"We are agreed," observed Gaudin; "but some care and patience will be necessary. Of course there is a barrier between the brothers of Madame de Brinvilliers and myself that must for ever prevent our meeting. I will provide the means, and you their application."

"I care not if I do," answered Lachaussée. "But what assurance have I that you will fulfil your part of our intent? Our words are breaths of air — our souls are no longer our own to deal with."

"You shall have a fair and written compact, on your own part," said Gaudin; "on mine, I have still your letter after the affair at Milan."

He rose to depart as he uttered these words; and, when he had quitted the room, Gaudin threw himself into a *fauteuil*, and was for a time wrapt in silence. Then, divesting himself of his upper garments, he put on a dingy working-dress, corroded into holes, and black with the smoke and dirt of a laboratory, and passing into an adjoining chamber, fitted up with a chemical apparatus, as if for the study of alchemy, — the outward pretext which most of the disciples of Toffana adopted to veil their proceedings, — he applied himself to work with the most intense application. Certain as the action was of the poisons he had hitherto used, defying all attempts to trace their existence, except of those who had created them, yet they appeared too slow for the projects he was conceiving; and he was now commencing a series of experiments upon the

properties of the deadly elements in his possession, before the results of which the achievements of Spara and Toffana fell into insignificance.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEAD-HOUSE OF THE HOTEL DIEU, AND THE ORGY AT THE HOTEL DE CLUNY.

THE autumn passed away, and winter came on in all its severity. The trees in the garden of the Tuileries and the Palais D'Orleans, where the parterres and avenues of the Luxembourg are now situated, rose naked and dreary towards the dull sky; and the snow lay deep upon the Butte St. Roche, uncarted and uncared for, threatening to inundate the lower streets in the vicinity when the thaw came. The public places, too, lost their air of life and business. The mountebanks, showmen, and dentists ceased to pitch their platforms on the Pont Neuf and Carrefour du Châtelet; for, although they were individuals inured to cold, yet they found the promenaders were more sensitive, and would not stop to listen to their harangues. The women were less attractive to the passing glance of the cavaliers in the streets, or the still mundane fathers in the churches. No more white shoulders, covered only by the rippling curls of the period, flashed in the afternoon sunlight; no more dazzling throats captured the hearts and the purses of the susceptible young gallants of the patrician *quartiers*, or whatever qualities supplied the perfect absence of either in the scholars of Cluny, Mazarin, and the Hôtel Dieu, attached to the Pays Latin. Sometimes an hour or two of warm sun-light brought the gossipers out in the middle of the day to their old haunts; elsewise they preferred assembling in the shops of the most approved retailers of passing scandal, and there canvassing the advantages or demerits of the different characters, or the probable

results of the various politics, then mostly talked of in the good city of Paris.

The shop of Maître Glazer, the apothecary of the Place Maubert, was the most favoured resort of the idle bourgeois. They loved it in the summer, when the pure air came through the open front of the window to dilute the atmosphere of cunning remedies that filled it; and it appeared to have the same charm in the winter, although closely shut; perhaps from the idea, with some, that the inhalation of the air laden with such marvellous odours of chemicals and galenicals would have all the effect of swallowing the things themselves, and on a cheaper and less noxious plan.

But, in truth, the shop of Maître Glazer possessed various advantages over others as a lounge for the gossipers. In his quality of apothecary he was admitted to the councils, arrangements, and disputes of all the families in the neighbourhood; and, not wishing to favour one more than another, he very properly retailed them in a circle from one to the other, which made his society much sought after: indeed, he was suspected of being sent for sometimes when the indisposition was a mere pretext for conversing a quarter of an hour with the apothecary, at such times as the supposed invalid was dying,—not in the common acceptance of the word, but to be satisfied with regard to any point deeply affecting some neighbour; and, as the cure in these cases was always very rapid, Maître Glazer got fresh honour thereby.

But, just at present, matters of deeper moment attracted the idlers to his shop than the discussion of mere domestic affairs. We have said that his reputation stood well in Paris as a talented compounder of antidotes to poisons: and the still increasing number of mysterious deaths in the city and faubourgs, which so entirely baffled all medical or surgical art, either to arrest the progress of the disease, or discover its source, although they were all attributed to the working of poison, provided subject for conversation in the mouths of everybody. The terrible episode, which formed so fearful a characteristic of the moral state of the reign of Louis the Fourteenth, was now talked of publicly

and generally; until the topic increasing led, but a very few years after the period of our story, to the establishment of the "Chambre des Poisons," ordained by order of the King to inquire into the deeds of the poisoners and magicians then practising in Paris, and punish them if the accusations were brought home.

Maître Glazer was in his shop, and so was his son Philippe, together with Maître Picard, Jean Blacquart the Gascon, and one or two of the bourgeois neighbours, talking over the events of the day. Panurge was compounding medicines at his usual post, and endeavouring to outlie the Gascon, according to custom; and sometimes their controversies ran so high, that they were only quieted when Philippe threatened to thrash them both at once, or beat every atom of flesh from Panurge's bones, which, looking to his miserable condition, was certainly not a process of any very great labour.

"I do not believe in all these stories," said Philippe; "they frighten the city, but not our profession. I admit that there is a grievous epidemic about, but the same symptoms attack those who die in and out of our hospital."

"Are the symptoms the same?" asked a neighbour.

"Precisely," replied Philippe: "there is the same wasting away of body and spirits; the same fluttering pulse and fevered system; the same low, crushing weariness of mind, until all is over. One would imagine, if all were true, that the poisoners were in the very heart of the Hôtel Dieu."

"I must have taken some myself," said Maître Picard. "My spirits sink, and I have a constant thirst: my pulse flutters too, wonderfully, albeit my body does not waste."

"May not Spara's disciples have got to the hospital?" asked the bourgeois who had before spoken.

"Pshaw!" said Philippe; "the sisters of charity are the only persons who tend our sick, and we can trust them. The Marchioness of Brinvilliers is amongst them. Whatever her faults, her kind words and gentle smile go far to soothe many pain-wearied frames; and yet she loses more of her patients than all the others."

"I have tested all the water used in the city," said

Glazer, "but found it pure and wholesome. And I have made Panurge drink buckets-full of it, but it never affected him."

"And yet to any one who cared to drug our fountains," said Philippe, "it would not be difficult, at nightfall, to row along the river, and climb up the pillars of the Samaritaine.* A portion in its reservoir would carry death tolerably well over the city by the next noontide."

"It might be done with advantage," said a bourgeois. "The greater part of its water goes to the basins and fountains of the Tuileries, and the people, who pay for it, die of drought. The King cares more for his swans and orange-trees than for his subjects."

"Neighbour Viot," said Maître Picard, "I am a public officer, and cannot allow such rebel talk."

"Beware of secret hurt rather than open authority," said Glazer. "Those words, so publicly expressed, may bring the Aqua Toffana into your goblet this very night."

The face of bourgeois Viot fell at the mere hint of impending danger.

"You surely do not think so?" he said.

"I do not say what I do not think," replied the apothecary. "If you have fear, after promulgating these rash sentiments, take some of my antidote with you: it is of rare virtue."

"It cured me," said Panurge, "after I had swallowed, at my master's orders, a quantity of the St. Nicholas manna enough to kill a horse."

"But an ass is a different animal, Panurge," said Philippe, as he took up his hat and left the shop.

The humble assistant did not dare to retort, but seeing the Gascon laughing at him, when Philippe had gone, he aimed a blow at him with a bleeding-staff, which would have hurt Blacquart sorely, had he not dived down and avoided it. As it was, the staff descended on the counter and broke a bottle, for which he was severely chidden by his master.

* The *Samaritaine* was a large hydraulic machine just below the Pont Neuf, where the floating *Bains de Louvre* are moored at present. It was a house erected upon piles, in form somewhat like a church, with a clock at one end. Having fallen to decay, it was entirely demolished in 1813.

In the meantime Philippe Glazer, leaving his father's, crossed the river by the Petit Pont, and took his way towards Notre Dame. The doors of the cathedral were still open, and he entered the southern aisle, now dimly lighted by a few votive tapers, which were flaring and guttering upon their rude iron stands in the currents of air that swept through the interior. A man, who was evidently waiting to meet him, emerged from the shadow of one of the pillars as he advanced.

"M. de Sainte-Croix!"

"Philippe Glazer!"

"We are truly met," said the student. "I received your note this evening, and you can come to the hospital with me."

"You are obliging me," said Gaudin; "I am anxious respecting the health of an old servant of mine, now an inmate."

"Pshaw! Captain Gaudin," replied Philippe, "between the 'Gens de la Courte Epée' there should be no secrets. It is a matter of gallantry, or I am mistaken: we are freemasons, you know, of a certain sort, and may trust each other."

Gaudin laughed, and made an evasive reply, as he took Philippe's arm; and the two, crossing the square before Notre Dame, entered the Hôtel Dieu. As they passed the lodge, the porter, recognising Philippe, gave him a note, which had been left for the gentleman who was expected to accompany him. Gaudin knew the writing, and hastily opened it. Its contents were as follows: —

"Do not notice me in the hospital, or suspicion will be aroused, and I shall not come again. In the Morgue we shall be free from interruption, and only there. Glazer will conduct you. "MARIE."

"Mass!" exclaimed Philippe, as Sainte-Croix mentioned the appointment, "a strange rendezvous! The lady has a bold mind within that delicate frame."

"Hush!" said Gaudin, pressing his arm; "do not speak so loud. Show me where the place is, and leave me."

"Most willingly, if you have courage. One might

select a livelier place, however, than the dead-house of an hospital for a trysting-place."

He took his companion by the hand, and they advanced along one of the arched passages, which the dim lamps barely illuminated, to the top of a flight of stairs. These they descended, and passing along another vaulted way, paused at a door at the extreme end. It was not fastened. Philippe threw it open, and they entered the Morgue of the hospital—the receptacle for such as died within the precincts of the Hôtel Dieu.

It was a dreary room, with bare white walls, and a cold stone floor, lighted by one ghastly lamp that hung against the wall. The frightful mortality for which the hospital was then remarkable, kept it well filled with its silent inmates. Some of these were placed upon the ground, enveloped in rough canvas wrappers,—the only coffins allowed them,—in the same state as they may now be seen brought to the Clamart, and other dissecting-schools of Paris; others lay ranged side by side upon large oval marble slabs, capable of accommodating from eight to ten bodies each, and these had merely coarse sheets, or palls, thrown over them. Over the stone floor a wooden trellis was placed, an inch or two in thickness; for the floor was below the level of the turgid Seine, which flowed immediately on the other side of the wall, and the reflection of the lamp glimmering through the interstices showed the water already in the "salle des cadavres."

As soon as Philippe Glazer had introduced Sainte-Croix to this dreary place he took his departure, and Gaudin was left alone. The light waved in the draught of air caused by opening and closing the door; and, as it played over the features of some of the corpses, they appeared to move, from the different shadows, and then to resume their wonted calm. In the fever of his mind Gaudin would almost have changed places with them. He had no nervous terror at being alone in such a dismal locality; his only feeling was one that approached to envy of their repose. A minute, however, had scarcely elapsed before the door again opened, and a female, enveloped in a mantle similar to those worn by the sisters of charity, entered. It

was the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, who now came to commune with her guilty ally.

They met with perhaps less eagerness than heretofore, albeit they had not seen each other for several days; but, although their passion had apparently decreased, yet ties more fearful and more enduring now bound their souls together in the common interest of mutual guilt. The whole world was contracted to the sphere in which they both moved; they knew of — cared for nothing beyond it, except those objects coming within the circle of their dark intent.

After the first greetings had passed, Marie looked cautiously from the door along the vaulted passage. Satisfied that no one was within hearing, she closed it, and going to the marble table, partially threw back the covering from one of the bodies; then, grasping Sainte-Croix's arm, she drew him towards her, saying in a low voice, but clear, and to him distinctly audible,

"It has done its work nobly, and baffled every physician of the Hôtel Dieu. This one swallowed it in wine, which my own maid, Françoise Roussel, brought to the hospital. The girl would taste it, as she went, upon the sly, and it well nigh cost the fool her life. This one shows what the confiture could do. He lingered long though, and became a skeleton, as you perceive, before his death."

Sainte-Croix was aghast at these revelations, although they had been anticipated. But the demoniac mind of his beautiful companion drew him still closer towards her; her nature rose grander and grander in the opinions of his dark soul, from the very fiendishness of its attributes.

"I am *sure* of its work," she continued. "Unlimited wealth, unquestioned freedom is in our grasp, so you but play up to my intentions. My brothers think they are ruling me as they would a wayward girl: how terrible will be my retribution!"

"I have much to tell you, Marie, of my own plans," said Gaudin; but it cannot be here. If those whom you have alluded to fall, others must go with them. We cannot pause in our career."

"There is one that I have marked as the earliest," re-

turned the marchioness. "I know not how it will affect your own feelings: in this instance I care not."

Her eyes sparkled with excitement as she spoke, and her rapidity of utterance became mingled with her hurried but irregular respiration. An expression passed across her face of mingled triumph and satisfaction, whilst the fingers of her hand were quickly working one over the other.

"And who is that, Marie?" asked Gaudin, his curiosity aroused by the manner of the marchioness.

"The pale-faced girl, whose acquaintance with yourself I became so unluckily acquainted with in the grotto of Thetis — your Languedocian leman — Louise Gauthier."

"She must not be injured!" exclaimed Sainte-Croix hurriedly.

"She must die!" replied the marchioness, with cold but determined meaning. "She loves you, and you may still care for her. You must be mine, and mine alone, Gaudin; your affections may not be participated in by another."

"All has finished between us, Marie! You are wrong — utterly wrong in your suspicions. You surely will not harm a poor girl like Louise?"

"Gaudin!" exclaimed his companion, fixing her glance on him with that intense expression, against the influence of which Sainte-Croix's determination could not prevail; "when we have fallen, — step by step, hour by hour, — and each time irrevocably, to all appearance, until a fresh abyss, yawning beneath our presence, disclosed a still lower hell open to receive us, — when the sympathies of the world have turned away from us to cling to fresh objects, in their parasitical attachment to the freshest and most plausible support; and our hopes and fears are merged into one blank feeling of careless determination by utter despair, — when all is given up, here and hereafter, — in such positions it is not likely that we should pause in the career marked out to be pursued by any sentiment of justice or consideration. I am determined."

There was the silence of some minutes after she had spoken, broken only by the laboured breathing of either party, or the drip of water, as, stealing through the walls

from the river, it fell upon the noisome floor. Each was waiting for the other to speak. Sainte-Croix was the first to break the pause. He knew that further allusion to Louise Gauthier would induce fresh recrimination, — that Marie would believe no protestation on his part that the attachment was over, — and that by boldly bearding her, in her present access of jealousy, the utter destruction of the poor girl would be hastened. He therefore endeavoured to turn the subject of their conversation into another channel.

"Where is your brother?" he asked. "You can act as you please towards the other person, as you appear to be beyond conviction from anything I can urge. François is at present the most important object for our vigilance. Is he in Paris?"

"He is not," replied the marchioness. "Both my brothers are at Offemont, arranging the distribution of the effects about the estate. They will remain there for some days, and then depart to Villequoy. Fortunately François has discharged one of his servants, and is compelled to look after many of his affairs himself, the superintendence of which would otherwise fall to his valet."

"Is he anxious to supply the place of the domestic?" inquired Gaudin eagerly.

"He is now looking out for some one. But why are you thus curious?"

"Because I have a creature in my employ — one who dares scarcely call his life his own, unless by my permission, who might fill the post with advantage."

"I do not see what we could gain by that," observed the marchioness.

"He might wait upon his master at table," said Gaudin, "and pour out his drink."

He regarded his companion with fixed intensity as he threw out the dark hint contained in his last words.

"But would there be no suspicion?" asked Marie.

"None," replied her lover. "For his own sake, he would keep the secret close as the grave. He has a ready wit, too, and an unabashed presence, that would carry him through any dilemma. I ought to know it."

"Hist!" cried Marie; "there is a noise in the passage. We are overheard."

"It is nothing," said Sainte-Croix. "The night-wind rushing along the passages has blown-to some of the doors."

The marchioness had gone to the entrance of the *salle*, and looked along the vaulted way that led to it. A door at the upper end was distinctly heard to close.

"I heard retreating footsteps!" she exclaimed rapidly, as she returned. "There have been some eavesdroppers, I tell you."

"Pshaw!" replied Gaudin; "who would come down here? It might be Philippe Glazer, who brought me into the hospital, and is anxious to know how much longer our interview is to last."

"He does not know me?" inquired the marchioness, in a tone that led up to the answer she desired.

"He knows nothing, beyond that I have some idle affair with a *religieuse*. Pardieu! if every similar gallantry was taken notice of in Paris, the newsmongers would have enough to do."

"However," said Marie, "it is time that we departed. I must go back to my dreary home."

And she uttered the last words in a tone of well-acted despondency, as she prepared to depart.

"Stay, Marie!" cried Gaudin. "You have said that your brothers are at Offemont; who else have you to mind? There is a *réunion* of all the best that Paris contains of life and revelry in the Rue des Mathurins this evening. You will go with me?"

"It would be madness, Gaudin. The city would ring with the scandal to-morrow morning."

"You can mask," returned Sainte-Croix, "and so will I. I shall be known to all I care about, and those I can rely on. Marie! you will come?"

He drew a visor from his cloak as he spoke, and held it towards the marchioness. The necessity for sudden concealment in the affairs of gallantry of the time, made such an article part of the appointments of both sexes.

Marie appeared to waver for an instant; but Gaudin

seized her hands, and whispered a few low, but intense and impassioned words closely in her ear, as though he now mistrusted the very air that, damp and thickened, clung around them. She pulled the white hood over her face, and, taking his arm, they quitted the dismal chamber in which this strange interview had taken place.

No notice was taken of them as they left the hospital. The porter was half asleep in his huge covered settle, still holding the cord of the door in his hand, and he pulled it open mechanically as they passed. On reaching the open space of the Parvis Notre Dame, Sainte-Croix hailed a *voiture de remise* — a clumsy, ill-fashioned thing, but still answering the purpose of those who patronised it, more especially as there was but a small window on either side, and that of such inferior glass, that the parties within were doubly private.

They crossed the river by the Petit-Pont, and proceeded first to the Rue des Bernardins, where Sainte-Croix's apartments were situated. Here the marchioness left the dress of the sisterhood, in which she had visited the hospital, and appeared in her own rich garments; the other having been merely a species of domino with which she had veiled her usual attire. The coach then went on by the Rue des Noyers towards the hôtel indicated by Gaudin.

"This is a wild mad action, Gaudin," said the marchioness. "If it should be discovered, I shall be indeed lost."

"There is no chance of recognition," replied Sainte-Croix, as he assisted his companion to fasten on her mask. "No one has tracked us."

"I am not so certain of that," said Marie. "My eyes have deceived me, or else I have seen, each time we passed a lamp, a figure following the coach, and crouching against the walls and houses. See! there it is again!"

As she spoke, she wiped away the condensed breath upon the windows with her mantle, and called Gaudin's attention to the street.

"There!" she cried: "I still see the same figure —

tall and dark — moving after us. I cannot discern the features."

"It is but some late passenger," said Gaudin, "who is keeping near our carriage for the safety of an escort. You must recollect we are in the centre of the cut-purse students."

The coach turned round the corner of the Rue des Mathurins as he spoke, crossing the Rue St. Jacques, and halfway along the street stopped at a *porte cochère*, which was lighted up with unusual brightness. The door was opened, and, as Gaudin assisted the marchioness to alight, both cast a searching glance along the narrow street in either direction; but, excepting a lacquey attached to the Hôtel de Cluny, where they now got down, not a person was visible.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE ORGY AT THE HOTEL DE CLUNY.

The Hôtel de Cluny, into the court-yard of which Gaudin led the marchioness on alighting from the carriage, is not only a building of great interest at the present day, but was equally celebrated in the middle ages, and so intimately connected with ancient Paris, even in the time of the Romans, that a very brief description of it may not be altogether out of place.

Any one who cares to visit it may arrive at its gates by proceeding up the Rue de la Harpe from the river, at the Pont St. Michel, and turning to the left in the Rue des Mathurins. But just before this point the Palais des Thermes will be passed, the remains of a vast Roman edifice, which once occupied a large area of ground in the Quartier Latin. Of this building the hall is still in tolerable preservation; and two stages of subterraneous passages may be traced to the length of about one hundred feet,

where they are choked up with ruins. There is, however, existing proof that they formed a perfect communication between the Palais des Thermes and the convent des Mathurins, at the other extremity of the street.

Upon the foundations of the Roman building, towards the close of the fifteenth century, Jacques D'Amboise, one of the nine brothers of Louis the Twelfth's minister, who bore that name, built the present edifice. The ground had been purchased more than a century previous by Pierre de Chaslus, an abbé of the celebrated order of Cluny, a portion of the Roman palace then being sufficiently perfect to reside in; and that became the residence of the abbés of Cluny when their affairs called them to Paris.

The new building was raised upon this site, and with the materials of the ancient structure; so that, at many parts of the Hôtel, the graceful architecture of the *moyen âge* may be seen rising from the foundation walls of Roman masonry. This is not, however, the only part to interest the artist or the antiquary. The entire edifice, built at an epoch of architectural revolution, is a mixture of the last inspirations of the gothic style with the first dawn of the *renaissance*.

At the commencement of the sixteenth century the Hôtel de Cluny was for some time the abode of Mary, the Queen of Louis the Twelfth, and sister of our own Henry the Eighth. She had been married only three months when she was left a widow, being then little more than sixteen.* Afterwards it was inhabited by a troop of come-

* The circumstances connected with the residence of Mary of England at the *Hôtel de Cluny* are somewhat too curious to be passed over at this place, although the freedom of Brantôme and Dulaure, in describing them, may be softened down with advantage. Louis was upwards of fifty when he married; his bride, as we have stated, about sixteen. On his death the crown fell, for want of a direct heir, to the Duke of Valois, afterwards Francis the First; but the young widow, in the hopes of being proclaimed Régente, feigned to be in that condition popularly asserted to be coveted by ladies who are attached to their lawful partners. And indeed the attentions of the gallant Duke of Valois were sufficiently pointed to lead the retailers of court scandal to hint that the fiction might possibly become a fact,—so much so, that the ministers remonstrated with him. They told him that he must have the greatest interest in seeing that the queen lived in honour, instead of attempting to pay his court to her; that, if she had a son, nothing could keep that son from ultimately coming to the throne, and that he, Francis, must retire contentedly to Brittany; in fact, that everything, altogether, would be as unpleasant for him as could possibly be. These admonishings appear to have had an effect upon the royal gallant, and somewhat quenched the fire of his passion, which was altogether put out by learning that an intrigue was all this while being carried on

dians, although by what means the players were enabled to establish themselves in a house avowedly the dwelling of the abbés of Cluny is not explained; and of which, whoever lived in it, they never ceased to be the landlords. Subsequently it was made a species of temporary convent for the reception of Marie Angélique Arnaud, the abbess of Port-Royal, and a large number of her nuns, whilst a religious establishment was built for them in the Rue de la Bourbe, which at the present day forms the Hospice de l'Accouchement of the same name.

It is now some six or seven years since we went over the Hôtel de Cluny. The then proprietor, M. du Sommerard, has since died, and we know not how his decease has affected the admission of strangers. Certainly it was at that time the most interesting object of curiosity that Paris afforded. You turned from the narrow, busy Rue de la Harpe into its quiet court, and modern Paris was for the moment forgotten in the contemplation of the old and graceful building, with its picturesque *tourelle*, — its beautifully-ornamented attic windows, each surrounded by a different pattern of florid gothic sculpture, — its antique spouts, and chiseled gallery running in front of the eaves, still showing its exquisite workmanship, in spite of the clumsy manner in which its trellised length had been patched up with mortar, and in many places totally concealed, — its vanes and gables. Within, it was rich indeed in venerable associations; there were collected all those articles of rare worth and *vertu* that made the Hôtel so famous: but these were not to us the principal attractions, for much was the result of comparatively modern labour. An atmosphere of antiquity pervaded the interior; you were sensible at once of that peculiar odour which clings to relics of former times, — that mixture of cathedral interiors, old burly red-edged books, worm-eaten

between the young Mary and Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, the most accomplished cavalier of his time, and to whom the princess had shown some partiality before her marriage with Louis. Francis made this discovery under rather awkward circumstances — no matter how — at the *Hôtel de Cluny*; and, by his commands, Mary and Suffolk were married immediately in the chapel of the edifice. The happy pair left Paris for London the same afternoon. Thus ended the adventure, by which Francis lost a mistress, but insured to himself the crown of France.

wainscoting, and damp closets, which is almost grateful, despite its elements. The sunbeam came through the patched coloured glass of the old windows, and fell in subdued and varied tints upon the relics which the rooms enshrined, —relics of every-day life in days long passed away,— which it would not mock with the garish light of present noon, except in the open gallery, and there the motes appeared to wake into existence in its rays, and dance about, until with its decline they fell back once more upon the old carvings and mouldings of the wood-work. In the disposition of the rooms, with their numberless articles of simple domestic use and homely furniture, the past was once more recalled; the visitor lived, for the time, in the bosom of a family long since forgotten, even to its very name; the solitude was dispelled, and the antique chambers were once more peopled with their former occupants, gliding noiselessly about the polished floors, circling round the table, still laid out for their meal, or kneeling at the chapel altar, as the quivering light fell on them, piercing the leaves that clustered from the trees of the garden adjoining about the windows. The day-dream was impressive and all-absorbing. The feeling upon once more turning into the busy hum of the city was that of dissatisfaction and confusion, like the first waking from a morning slumber, in which we have been again communing with those whom we once loved.

Sainte-Croix and Marie entered the principal door of the *corps-de-logis* of the Hôtel, and passed up the staircase. He was recognised and saluted respectfully by the domestics, as one on terms of great intimacy with the master. The interior of the Hôtel was brilliantly illuminated; and every now and then sounds of the wildest revelry burst along the corridors, as the heavy rustling curtains that hung over the doors were thrust on one side. As they neared the principal room, a man stepped out and met them. His symmetrical figure was well set off by a magnificent dress; his physiognomy was *spirituelle*, without being handsome; his presence was commanding and prepossessing.

"My dear Sainte-Croix," he exclaimed as he saw Gau-

din, "you are welcome. The hours were flying by so rapidly, that I began to think we should not see you."

"Time generally runs away with bright grains, marquis, whenever you direct his flight. He must fill his glass from the sands of Pactolus when he measures your enjoyments."

"Will you present me to your fair companion?" said the host, as he glanced towards the marchioness.

"Henriette," said Gaudin, using a false name to his partner, "this is the Marquis de Lauzun. His mere name conveys with it all those good qualities which, in one less known, we should mention distinctly."

The marquis bowed, and Marie inclined in return to his salute, trembling at the same time; for she knew him well, and was fearful of being discovered. And indeed Lauzun perceived in an instant, by her deportment, that her manners had more of the court than the *coulisses* about them.

"You have a charming residence, marquis," she observed, endeavouring to disguise her voice.

"Say, rather, the abbés of Cluny have," replied De Lauzun; "for I am here only as an intruder. But they are too liberal to me. In return for some poor advantages I persuaded his Majesty to bestow upon their order, they give up their house to me whenever I require it. Let us join the company who honour me this evening."

He threw aside the heavy tapestry as he spoke, and ushered Sainte-Croix and Marie into the *salon*. The scene that presented itself was most exciting,—almost bewildering from its gorgeous revelry. The whole suite of rooms had been thrown open, and was one blaze of light; the innumerable wax candles, shedding their brilliancy upon the throng from every available position, clustered in galaxies of bright twinkling stars round the elaborately-framed and quaintly-shaped looking-glasses that characterised the domestic architecture of the time, even in our own days always associated with splendid elegance and refinement; or diminishing in long perspectives of light along the corridors, and through the other apartments branching off from the principal room, the comparatively

low ceiling giving them a look of much greater extent than they in reality possessed.

A joyous crowd had assembled together; all that Paris then knew of reckless enjoyment and debauchery had collected that evening in the Hôtel de Cluny. The cavaliers and dames were in equal numbers; some of the latter were as closely masked as Marie, as were a few — very few — of the gentlemen. Others of the fair visitors displayed their charms, both of face and bust, to the full, in the same loose fashion that they would have patronised in the warm season upon the Pont Neuf and Carrefours. And the attractions of these beauties were of no ordinary character. Handsome beyond expression the majority indeed were, under the most ordinary circumstances; but now their full swimming eyes were sparkling with excitement, — a glow of warmth and vivid life flushed their damask cheeks, — the long clusters of perfumed and glossy hair showered tremblingly upon their rounded shoulders, — and, as the light badinage or wicked repartee fell from their rosy lips, followed by the joyous peals of their silvery laughter, their mouths displayed pearly rows of teeth, which fairly dazzled by their brilliancy, and alone outshone the whiteness of their skin.

The various alcoves, containing beds, fitted up with magnificent hangings and curtains of rich brocade, shot with gold or embroidered with the most elaborate devices, were all thrown open, according to custom, separated only from the rooms by light gilt railings; and within these, various young seigneurs were lounging, playing at dice or tables, surrounded by a crowd of lookers-on; and the profusion of broad pieces scattered carelessly about showed that the play was high and reckless. The extremity of the gallery was veiled by some fine fabric, and behind this, concealed from the view, a band of musicians, of a number then seldom collected, was performing the latest compositions of the court. In the centre, a table glittering with plate and glass, was loaded with the choicest refreshments, and the most ingenious devices in confectionary, surrounding a fountain of marvellous workmanship, modelled, after the Bassin de Neptune at Versailles, in dead silver and crystal,

playing various kinds of wine, which fell into several compartments, whence it was drawn by the guests into chased silver flagons and goblets of variegated Bohemian glass. The air was heavy with costly perfumes, whose vapours wreathed out from antique tripods; and every flower that art could force into bloom, for the time of year, assisted to form the rich bouquets that were placed about in all directions.

"Place, messieurs," cried Lauzun gaily, affecting the manners of a chamberlain, "for the Captain Gaudin Sainte-Croix, who will throw down his dice as a gage to any adversary who chooses to meet him!"

A number of young men welcomed Gaudin as the others spoke. He was evidently popular amongst them, possessing in a high degree that fatal versatility of pleasing which can mask the most heartless and unprincipled disposition with a semblance of the most ingenuous gaiety and *franchise*.

"I pledge you, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix," cried a cavalier, whose dress was a strange mixture of extreme elegance and the roughest texture, "and will place a hundred louis d'ors against your own."

"A match!" cried Gaudin, throwing his purse on the bed, round which the party gathered, including Marie, who still kept close to his side.

"There are my pieces," replied the other; "they need no counting."

And he placed a rude leathern bag by Sainte-Croix's sparkling purse.

"I shall beat you, Chavagnac," said Gaudin.

"You will be clever to do it," observed a bystander. "The Count de Chavagnac has ruined us this night."

"A new gown of ruby velvet *à longues manches*, at the next Foire Sainte Germain, for me, if you win, Chavagnac," said one of the handsomest of the women.

"You shall have it, Marotte," replied the count.

"What do you promise me, M. De Sainte-Croix, for old friendship?" continued Marotte Dupré,—for it was her,—turning to Gaudin. "Let it be a kiss, if it be nothing else."

Gaudin looked towards her, and pressed her arm, as he contracted his forehead, and made a sign of silence. He felt a sudden shudder pass over the frame of the marchioness; and, when he turned round, her eyes glared like a fury's through her mask. She withdrew her arm, and coldly fell back, as she whispered,

"My eyes are being opened anew. Beware!"

Gaudin was for the instant annoyed, and returned no answer. Marotte Dupré had not taken the hint, and continued,

"You owe me something on the score of your conduct when Antoine Brinvilliers carried me to the Rue d'Enfer against my will. By the way, where is his wife, Dubois? You know the secrets of every woman in our good city."

This was addressed to the Abbé Dubois, whose name as a gallant, either on his own part or that of the King's, was pretty well established.

"Where she should be,—quietly at home," replied the abbé. "Brinvilliers is on his travels. He is another man since she left him, or he left her, or they left one another. How is it, M. de Sainte-Croix?—you ought to know."

"By the mass!" cried Gaudin angrily, "my sword can answer the curiosity of any one better than my tongue."

"It is the more innocent weapon of the two in Paris just at present," said Marotte. "O my reputation!"

Gaudin looked towards Marie. By the quivering of a jewelled aigrette that formed a portion of her head-dress, he could see that she was trembling, and her hand tightly clutched part of the rich curtain that hung beside her.

"*Chut!*" cried Lauzun, observing Sainte-Croix's kindling temper; "to your play."

"Nine!" said Gaudin, throwing his dice, as he caught at the opportunity of turning the subject.

"Nine also," observed Chavagnac, throwing.

"Ten!" exclaimed Gaudin. "Will you pay me half, or run the chance?"

"I will play," replied Chavagnac, gently shaking the dice-box. "Twelve."

"*Peste!*" cried Gaudin, "you have gained them. I thought my dice knew better than that."

"You forgot whose they were to play against," said Chavagnac with a grim smile, taking up the money. "Come, I shall be in funds again. Lauzun's hospitality has kept me from the high-road. The twelve hundred pistoles I appropriated from the good people of the Garonne were nearly gone."

"You can still give me the kiss, Gaudin, without being entirely ruined," said Marotte Dupré, as she pouted her red lips towards him.

Sainte-Croix inclined his head towards her. As he did so, Marie darted forward, and violently drew him back. The action was seen by all the bystanders. They said nothing, but shrugged their shoulders; whilst Marotte Dupré looked as if she felt perfectly ready for another duel with her new and unknown rival.

"Messieurs," cried Lauzun, "I have a novelty in store for you. I have picked up a fellow on the Pont-Neuf, who will sing you couplets about yourselves by the mile. He is there every afternoon that it is warm enough for folks to stand and listen."

"Let us see him," said Dubois, anxious with the rest to turn the attention of the company. "*A diable les femmes!* There is not a misery in the world but is connected with them, if you search its source."

"Nor a pleasure," replied Lauzun. "You ought to know, abbé, if experience teaches anything."

"And Monsieur does know," said a person who entered just at the moment. A glance sufficed to show Sainte-Croix that it was Benoit, who appeared to have re-assumed, in part, his ancient mountebank costume.

"This is the fellow," said Lauzun. "Come, friend," he continued, addressing the other, "do you see any one here you can sing about?"

"That do I," said Benoit, looking over the crowd; "there is the Abbé Dubois."

"Respect the church," cried Lauzun laughing. "The abbé is beyond your couplets."

"Not at all," said Benoit. "Mère Ledru left the Quartier Saint-Honoré but yesterday, entirely to save her daughter from his addresses. Oh! the abbé is a *bon diable*, but sly in his pursuits. Hem!"

And clearing his voice, he sang these lines, the others repeating the last lines in chorus: —

" Monsieur l'Abbé, ou allez-vous ?
Vous allez vous casser le cou,
Vous allez sans chandelles,
Eh bien !
Pour voir les demoiselles !
Vous m'entendez bien !
C'est bien !
Pour voir les demoiselles !"

"Silence, rascal!" cried Dubois, hurling some pieces at Benoit's head, who picked them up, put them in his pocket, and was quieted directly, — sooner, indeed, than the laugh against the gallant abbé which he had raised.

"Let M. de Sainte-Croix have his turn," said Chavagnac. "Do you know him, fool?"

Benoit glanced expressively at Gaudin as he commenced: —

" Monsieur Gaudin de Sainte-Croix,
Whence do you your treasures draw ?
Not from dice, nor cards alone,
Nor philosophy's rare stone,
Biribi !
Why affect such scenes as these,
And neglect your *belle Marquise ?*
Where is she ?
Left lamenting, like Louise.—
Sacristie !"

Gaudin's cheek flamed with anger. The company observed that he was stung deeper than mere badinage could have done; and this time the laugh was less general than the one which had been raised against the abbé. He drew Marie's arm closer within his own, and, with a look of vengeance at Benoit, left the circle; whilst the other proceeded to launch a couplet against Chavagnac, filled with no very complimentary allusions to his wild spirit of appropriation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SAINTE-CROIX AND MARIE ENCOUNTER AN UNINVITED GUEST.

THEY were each in ill humour with one another. The apparent intimacy of Marotte Dupré had aroused all Marie's jealousy, so terrible in its very calm; and Gaudin had been annoyed by Benoit's allusions. They passed along the room without speaking, nor was it until they gained an apartment at the end of the suite that a word was spoken.

It was a small room they entered, with two deeply-stained windows, and lighted by lamps placed on the outer side of the glass, producing almost the same effect as though it had been day.

"I think you must repent having brought me here," said the marchioness, coldly. "It was badly contrived on your part not to forewarn your other favourites, that they might have been more cautious."

"Your suspicions are so utterly without foundation," replied Sainte-Croix, "that I shall not take the pains to refute them. At present there are other matters of deeper import that demand my attention. I expect, when you learn all, you will give yourself little care about the continuance of our *liaison*. We may then know some respite from the fevered restlessness and uncertainty of our connection. We have experienced but little since we have been acquainted."

There was a bitterness of tone in his manner of pronouncing the last sentences that attracted the attention of the marchioness.

"What are you alluding to?" she asked.

"In a word, Marie, I am ruined. The sum of money I brought here with me to-night, in the hope of doubling it, is gone. I am deeply involved: my creditors are pressing me on every side, and I know not which way to turn to extricate myself."

"You judge me too harshly, Sainte-Croix," replied the

marchioness. "My sweetest revenge would be to assist you when you were utterly destitute. What must be done? The money left me by my father is in my brothers' keeping. Not a sol is spent but I must render them an account."

"But one step is left to be taken," said Gaudin. "The time has arrived: they must be removed."

Marie remained for a time silent, as if waiting for Sainte-Croix more fully to develope his meaning. At length she spoke:

"I know not how we can proceed. I cannot tell whether it be my own fancy or there is in reality ground for suspicion, but my brothers appear to watch me in every action — every step. I see so little of them, too. They are seldom in the Rue Saint Paul."

"We must set other agencies to work," said Gaudin. "An apparent stranger would never be suspected."

"It is dangerous," replied the marchioness.

"It is necessary," added Sainte-Croix. And after a moment's pause he continued: — "The man Lachaussée, whom you have seen with me, is mine, body and soul. I can in an instant cause to fall the sword which hangs over his head. Your brothers' occupation of Offemont will require an increase of their establishment: can we not get Lachaussée into their service? They will then be comparatively in our hands."

"Is he to be trusted?"

"He is as wily as an adder, and as fatal in his attack, to those who have not charmed him. I will put this scheme in train to-morrow. He only awaits my word to proceed."

"It must be done," replied the marchioness.

And then she uttered a long deep sigh, the relief to her overcharged heart being accompanied by a low moan of intense mental pain — not from remorse, but utter despondency of the reaction of her spirits, and the apparent blackness of the prospect before her. The next moment, as if ashamed of the demonstration of her feelings, she started up from the couch on which they had been sitting, and prepared to return to the principal room. As she ed-

vanced towards the door, she took a brilliant jewelled chain from her neck, and placed it in Gaudin's hands.

"Whilst we have an opportunity," she said, "let me give you this carcanet. It is of some value, and, by selling it at the Quai des Orfevres you can provide for your present superficial expenses."

Gaudin did not hesitate to take the costly ornament. He knew the necessities of his position; besides, all finer feelings of delicacy had long been merged in the gulf of his darker passions. He placed the chain in the pocket of his cloak, and went towards the corridor. But, as they were about to pass out, a portion of a large book-case, masking a door with imitations of the backs of volumes, was thrown open, and Exili stood before them.

Marie uttered a slight cry of alarm, as she started at the sudden apparition. Sainte-Croix seized the handle of his sword, and partly drew it from its scabbard; but the moment he recognised the physician he returned it.

"Exili!" he exclaimed.

"You may well be surprised," replied the intruder. "I can excuse your alarm, especially when you had such interesting schemes to settle."

"He has heard everything!" said the marchioness to Sainte-Croix.

She spoke in a low, hurried tone, scarcely above a whisper; but the quick ears of Exili caught the import.

"Ay, everything," he replied, with emphasis upon the last word; "both here, and when you thought there were no others near you but the silent inmates of the *salle des cadavres* at the Hôtel Dieu."

She instantly recollected the alarm which the noise of footsteps had caused at the hospital, and the figure which Marie persisted in saying had followed them in the Rue des Mathurins.

"Every day — every hour," continued Exili, as his eyes blazed upon them like those of a famished animal in sight of food, "brings you closer and closer to my toils."

"I presume I may be spared from this threatened revenge," said Marie, "whatever it be. There has been nothing in common between us. I know you not."

"But I know *you*, Marchioness of Brinvilliers," returned Exili. "I ought to. The mention of your name, one fine spring evening, on the Carrefour du Châtelet, caused me to be hunted like a beast from my habitation, and confined for many lingering months in the noisome cells of the Bastille. You caused the punishment: you shall assist in its reparation, or, failing therein, be ruined with your paramour."

"Miscreant!" cried Sainte-Croix, as he seized an antique axe from a stand of ancient arms that surmounted the mantelpiece; "silence! except you would have your miserable life ended at this instant."

"Strike, Monsieur," replied Exili calmly. "Kill me here, if you please; and to-morrow morning you will be summoned by the Procureur du Roi to attend the exhumation of the body of M. Dreux D'Aubray, and witness the result of certain chemical tests which I have written down, and which will be delivered to the police by a trusty acquaintance when he hears of my death."

Sainte-Croix's arm fell, with the weapon, by his side. He gazed at Exili with his brows knit in corrugations of painful intensity.

"What do you want?" he added, in a thick, quivering voice.

"The trade of sorcerer is failing," continued Exili; "we are compelled to burrow like animals underground, and dare not face the day. That of poisoner is in a yet worse position, thanks to the lieutenant of police, M. de la Reynie. I must have money to enable me to retire, and die elsewhere than on the Grêve."

"I am ruined," replied Gaudin. "This evening's play has robbed me of the last sum I possessed."

"But you expect more," he replied, when madame's brothers are removed. M. D'Aubray was rich, and, in fault of other children, she will be sole heiress, beyond a trifling annuity to her sister, who has for some years retired from the world. You know this, and have calculated on it."

They returned no reply. Exili took a small roll of parchment from his vest — the portion of some old deed — and continued: —

"What is easier than for you to give me your promise

that I shall share this wealth with you? I have drawn up the conditions."

He read them over to Gaudin slowly and distinctly; and, as he concluded, laid them upon a marble table close at hand.

"We have here neither pen nor ink," said Gaudin.

"Pshaw: this evasion is contemptible," replied Exili, as he threw up his loose black sleeve. "See here — the yellow shrivelled skin will barely cover these blue veins. They are full of blood, and easily opened."

He took a lancet from his pouch, and pierced one of the vessels; then, as the blood sluggishly trickled forth, he twisted a slip of parchment to a point spirally, and, loading it with the red fluid, gave it to Gaudin.

"You might write fairer characters with a better pen," he said; "but this will answer every purpose. I use it from necessity, not to make the document more impressive; for blood is to me no more than ink."

Sainte-Croix hastily signed the paper; and then Exili took it up, and, having looked to see that all was fairly done, replaced it in his vest.

"You can continue your enjoyments," he said; "but do not seek to follow me. Hereafter I will receive you. I make no mystery to you of the way by which I came here. The passage below this door has a communication with the Palais des Thermes, and I occupy the vault for my laboratory. You will find me there, if you enter from the Rue de la Harpe, and show the man at the gate this talisman. The place is, to all appearance, a cooper's workshop."

He placed a small triangular piece of parchment, covered with fantastic figures, which might have been an amulet for any dupe that had consulted him, in Gaudin's hand. He then entered a species of closet, the back panel of which revolved on a pivot, allowing him to pass out, after he had reclosed the masked door of the book-case.

CHAPTER XXIV.

LOUISE GAUTHIER FALLS INTO DANGEROUS HANDS..

THE same company filled the apartments as Gaudin and Marie returned. But the mirth was wilder, and the laugh louder; the equivocal jest was hazarded with greater freedom, and the repartee was bolder. Several of the company still preserved their masks; but many of the females had discarded theirs, who hitherto had kept their faces closely veiled, and now demonstrated the singular grades of female society, from the highest to the very lowest, that had collected together. A branch-room had been fitted up as a temporary stage, and on this a number of dancers from Versailles were performing a ballet, lately produced at court, *La Naissance de Venus*, in such costumes as were especially appropriate to the subject. It concluded as the marchioness arrived in the salon.

"Lauzun seems inclined to make a reputation," said Sainte-Croix to Dubois. "Fouquet himself would have felt his eyes blink at such magnificence."

"I question whether he enjoys it, though," was the reply. "But it suits his policy. What piece of diplomacy is he bringing to bear with those two actresses?"

"Let us assist him," said Gaudin, advancing towards a recess in which the host was talking with great volubility to two of his fair guests, one of whom was Marotte Dupré. The other Sainte-Croix directly recognised as her rival, Estelle des Urlis.

"I am suffocating with thirst," said the marchioness, drawing Gaudin in another direction. "Give me some wine."

They turned towards the fountain, when her companion filled one of the glass cups and gave it to her. Marie drank off the contents with fevered eagerness, and then again took Sainte-Croix's arm.

"There," cried Lauzun, "I have brought together two most bitter enemies, and I now engage that they shall be

as warm friends. Come—we will pledge this reconciliation generally. Dubois, Chavagnac, Gaudin—you must join us."

"Marotte, will you be our Hebe?" asked Chavagnac.

"She shall not be mine," exclaimed Estelle. "Though we are now friends, I would prefer filling for myself. I shall then be sure of what I drink."

"Are *you* afraid of the poisoners, Estelle?" said Marotte. "I should have thought you had been too well acquainted with them."

"A truce to this," said Lauzun, who perceived the tempers of the fair ones were again rising. "The poisoners have all passed away."

"I know M. de la Reynie, the magistrate," said Marotte, "and he tells a different story. He says he has a clue to some of them, and will have them before long. Then there will be bonfires on the Grêve, and I shall go and see them."

She clapped her hands with delight at the anticipated spectacle.

"You went with me to see the last, M. de Sainte-Croix," continued Marotte: "you are too proud now."

And she eyed the marchioness as she spoke with no very kind expression.

"It was the Veuve Maupas who was burned," she went on. "She petitioned to wear a mask at her execution, and they allowed her. Catherine Deshayes—La Voisin, as they call her—is suspected; but at present they can only prove that she showed M. de Beauvais the devil. She wears a mask. *I* would never wear one, for fear I should be taken for an *empoisonneuse*."

The marchioness almost fainted at these words of Marotte, intended to be nothing more than spiteful. She clutched closer hold to Sainte-Croix's arm to keep from falling.

"Pshaw! let this pass," said Lauzun. "Ha! Desgrais! Will you join this party?"

"Hush!" replied the person addressed; "not a syllable of my name, marquis, or you will defeat my plans."

He was a handsome man, in the dress of an abbé, and was not above thirty years old. His stature was above the middle height, and his frame muscular and well-proportioned, whilst in his eyes there was a peculiar expression of energy and sagacity. It was Desgrais, the most active exempt of the Marechaussée, in one of the disguises he was accustomed to assume with such success.

"Have you been on any track to-night?" asked Lauzun in a low voice.

"No, monsieur," replied the exempt; "but I am upon one now. Who is that with Sainte-Croix?"

"I do not know. She has been closely masked all the evening. Is she suspected of anything?"

"No," replied Desgrais, with apparent unconcern; "no — nothing. I have something to say to her companion, though."

As he spoke, he went to the side of Sainte-Croix, and whispered,

"Can you spare me a minute or two, monsieur, in private? I have some business concerning you which requires immediate adjustment."

Sainte-Croix trembled for the instant as he recognised Desgrais; but his presence of mind immediately returned, and he said gaily to Lauzun,

"Marquis, I may leave this lady in your charge for two minutes. Be courteous to her as you are a gentleman, and a friend of mine."

Marie started back as Gaudin withdrew his arm, and vainly endeavoured to make him seek some other cavalier; for she feared a recognition. But, anxious to know what was the motive of the exempt's appointment, he took no notice of her; and, handing her over to Lauzun, followed him to the landing at the top of the grand staircase, where they were alone.

"You will excuse this interruption," said Desgrais. "I have been looking after you all day; for I thought a meeting might save you much unpleasantness. I believe you know M. Francois D'Aubray?"

"What of him?" asked Sainte-Croix, quickly. "Is he not at Offemont?"

"He was until this morning," replied Desgrais; "but has returned somewhat unexpectedly, with some provincial neighbours."

Gaudin started as he thought of Marie.

"We must be candid with one another, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix," continued the exempt. "I need scarcely tell you that, in my position with the police, there are few in Paris whose circumstances and connections are not well known to me; amongst them I may count your own debts, and your affair with the Marchioness of Brinvilliers."

"Well, Monsieur?"

"Well, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix. Her brother has tried in every way to crush you, and has in every way failed, until he has now bought over the greater part of the debts owing by you in Paris. The task was not difficult; for your creditors — excuse me — had better faith in his ready gold than in your promises. In his name, and collectively for those accounts, I now arrest you."

"Monsieur!" cried Gaudin, "it is impossible for me to go with you to-night. The arrest I care nothing for, for it can soon be settled; but there is a lady here whom I cannot leave. You must postpone this affair until to-morrow, when you will find me at home."

"It is as much as my position is worth," replied Desgrais. "Everything will give place to a lady but a court of justice. You must come with me."

He spoke with such a tone of calm firmness, that Gaudin perceived at once he must comply.

"You will let me speak to her?" he asked.

"I would not have you go back to the room: a scene would but be painful to all of us. Write what you like, and send it to her. We will then go down to some of the money-lenders on the Quai des Orfevres. If you can raise a sop for this Cerberus of a lieutenant-civil, believe me I shall be too happy. It is far from my wish to put to inconvenience so gallant a gentleman as Captain de Sainte-Croix."

The well-intended politeness with which this speech was made, somewhat reassured Gaudin. He was not without hope of raising sufficient money, at all events, to quiet

his persecutor for a time. He therefore wrote a few hasty lines to Marie, and, bidding a servant who passed give them to the masked lady with the Marquis de Lauzun, told Desgrais he was ready to accompany him, and knock up some of the usurers in question.

"I have a carriage waiting in the Rue de la Harpe," said Desgrais, "and we will proceed to the river immediately. Stop! — some one is coming up these stairs. Let us take the other flight."

In effect a tumult was audible in the court, which neither had a desire to face. They therefore passed further along the gallery, and gained the *porte cochère* by another and less distinguished staircase.

Whilst this hurried interview had been going on without, the same wild mirth and laughter resounded through the apartments. Lauzun had been vainly endeavouring to discover the name of the lady entrusted by Sainte-Croix to his protection; but Marie contrived to disguise her voice in such a manner, that he had not the slightest suspicion. And to this end her mask somewhat contributed, which, made after the fashion of the time, had a small plate of silver arranged so as to go into the mouth, and quite alter the tones of those speaking with it.

As Gaudin left, the valet brought the few lines he had hastily scribbled to the marchioness, and then spoke in a low tone to Lauzun. She read with utter dismay the following hurried message: —

"I am arrested by Desgrais. Your brother has returned from Offemont. Leave as speedily as you can, and get home unobserved. I may be detained all night.

"GAUDIN."

She was on the point of withdrawing from Lauzun, when he cried out, —

"Fair ladies and gallant gentlemen, my fellows have captured a queen for our *Fête de Fortune*, and she shall adjudge the prizes. Barnard! — Laurent! — bring in your prize."

As he spoke, the curtains at the door were parted, and two of Lauzun's valets half dragged half carried a young female into the room, who appeared to be making violent

resistance. Her eyes were bandaged, not with a common handkerchief, but a sparkling fillet, evidently intended for the purpose, and to be worn in the part she was about to play against her will in one of the diversions of the evening. The company directly thronged round her, entirely stopping up the doorway, so that the egress of the marchioness was rendered impossible, at least for the present.

The task about to be imposed upon the stranger was that of distributing various toys, trinkets, and *bonbons*, of comparatively small value, to the guests as they were led up to her, her eyes being blindfolded; and the game derived its excitement from the incongruity or appropriateness of the objects offered. A stranger was always selected for this office; and it was the custom, at orgies of this kind, to scour the streets in the vicinity, and lay hands upon the first young and personable female that could be met with, the victim being generally of the class of grisettes. Enough could be seen of the features of the new comer to prove that she was very handsome; but she was very thinly clad, her extreme undress being covered by a large cloak, which, as well as she was able, she kept tightly round her.

"How did you catch this pretty bird?" asked Lauzun of one of the valets.

"Monsieur," replied the fellow, "we had scoured all the streets in the Quartier without meeting one eligible grisette, for it is now late, when Laurent saw a light in a window of the Rue des Cordeliers. I climbed up —"

"No — it was I that first climbed, monsieur," interrupted his fellow.

"Silence! you knaves," cried Lauzun, "or we will prevent each of you from speaking, by splitting your tongues now and here. Go on, Laurent."

"I climbed up, and saw through the casement our captive retiring to bed, — at least, she was partly undressed; and I said to Barnard, 'This is our prey.'"

"And you nearly lost her, because you would keep looking," said his fellow.

"Will you be quiet, sir?" asked Lauzun with a threatening look. "Well, what did you do next?"

"We set fire to the outer wood-work of the house, and then raised the cry *Au feu!* In half a minute our beauty rushed into the street, as you now see her. We heard the Garde Bourgeoise approaching, — we hurried her off to the *chaise à porteurs* we had at the corner, — brought her to the *porte derobée*, — and here we are." *

"You may remove the bandage just at present," said Lauzun. "We should like to see what sort of eyes it veils."

The valets took the fillet away from her face, and in a second the marchioness recognised the features of Louise Gauthier, whom she had not seen since the evening of the stormy interview in the Grotto of Thetis during the fêtes at Versailles. She did not, of course, make herself known; but at that instant, in the midst of all her anxiety to reach the Hôtel D'Aubray without the knowledge of her brother, a second thought for the time detained her. An opportunity appeared likely to occur of accomplishing the determination she had formed — of getting Louise Gauthier in her power, and destroying her. She drew herself away from Lauzun's side, and retreating to one of the couches, awaited the proper time to carry her projects into execution.

"I beseech you, gentlemen, let me depart," exclaimed Louise, as the scene around presented itself to her bewildered eyes. "There is some mistake in this cruelty; you cannot want me here."

"Indeed, but we could not select a better goddess throughout Paris," said Lauzun. "It is not usual for the grisettes of our quartier to wish to leave the Hôtel de Cluny, when they once find themselves within its walls. Let me salute you, as a stranger."

Lauzun, with an assumption of idle gallantry, rather than the wish to insult the poor girl, advanced towards her, and was about to proffer his welcome, when he was somewhat rudely interrupted by the approach of Benoit, who had been amusing the guests at another part of the room with specimens of his new vocation.

* An outrage of this kind was by no means uncommon in the reckless times of Louis Quatorze, nor did its commission excite much attention, if we may credit the memoirs of the above-mentioned Abbé Dubois.

"*Tiens!*" he exclaimed with surprise; "why, it is our little Louise, whom we have not seen for so long!"

The girl heard Benoit's voice, and sprang towards him for protection.

"Get back, fellow!" said Lauzun, not relishing the interruption.

"Excuse me, marquis," replied the other; "but I consider myself responsible for our Louise's welfare. It has been my lot to assist her before to-night."

"Put this man on one side," said Lauzun to his valets.

"Keep off!" said Benoit, as they approached, "or I will send you on a flight without wings through the window."

"Turn him out of the house," said Lauzun; "or rather put him in the cellar: he won't alarm any one there. Away with him, I say!"

The foremost of the servants advanced; but Benoit met him with a blow from his own sturdy arm, which sent him reeling against the wall of the apartment. The other servants immediately threw themselves upon him; and the honest Languedocian, whose good angel always appeared to desert him when services were most required, was in an instant borne away, kicking and struggling, to one of the underground chambers of the hôtel.

Meantime the company disposed themselves for the games. Lauzun went up to Louise, and, assuring her that no evil was intended if she complied with their regulations, fastened the bandage once more across her eyes; whilst Marotte Dupré, who had some recollection of having seen her with Madame Scarron at Versailles, took off a rich cloak of green satin, with large full sleeves, which she had been wearing, and made the poor stranger don it, in lieu of the mantle which at present scarcely enveloped her dishabille, at the same time telling her that no evil was really intended to herself. The greater part of the company then formed into a large circle, holding hands, and moving round to measure, the band being apparently well aware of what was going on, although, as we have stated, concealed from the sight. Louise was placed on an elevated seat; a large basket, containing the awards, was placed at her side, and the game commenced.

A variety of intricate figures were first danced, in which the partners were frequently changed, somewhat in the style of our cotillons at the present day. In this the actresses showed themselves most apt, and they were now joined by the girls who had figured in the ballet. To avoid being particularised, Marie stood up with the rest; and the exceeding grace with which she threaded the mazes of the figure, attracted general attention. Lauzun saw that she was evidently belonging to a phase of society superior to the majority; but he was unable to gain the slightest clue to her real name.

At last, at a given signal, they all stopped with the partners they happened to have at that instant, and then advanced in pairs before Louise, who tremblingly distributed the different articles to them; and the gentleman and lady were expected in turn to make some speech appropriate to the gifts presented. In this the principal address was shown; for whilst some could but mumble out a few clumsy phrases or compliments, others convulsed the assembly with laughter at a smart repartee or jest. Truth to tell, the greater portion of them were all tolerably well up to their business; for habitude had rendered them tolerably *au fait* at uttering a jest on the spur of the moment; and, as a pretty wide licence was allowed, when a laugh could not be raised by wit, it was done by *entendre*.

Lauzun had a small trinket-key given to him; and Estelle recommended him to keep it against he got into the Bastille, which would be sure to occur, in the common course of things, before three weeks. Marotte Dupré had a heart of sweetmeat, and her partner an imitation-piece of money of the same material, about which appropriate distributions Dubois made great mirth, having a ready tact for *impromptus*. When the signal for the cessation of the dance was made (which the leader of it generally took care to do when he found himself with an agreeable partner), Chavagnac was next to the Marchioness of Brinvilliers. He led her forwards, and the rest of the company looked on with more than usual interest to see what the *incognita* would gain. By an error of Louise, who was throughout the ceremony so flurried that she scarcely knew what she

was doing, she presented the first gift to Chavagnac,—a small flacon of scent, than which nothing could be more absurd, rough soldier, almost marauder, as he was. But to Marie, and to her alone, her own present had a terrible meaning. It was a small headsman's axe, in sugar and silver foil!

She sickened as she gazed at the terrible omen,—so perfectly unimportant to the rest of the company,—and turned away from the circle, heedless of some unmeaning words that Chavagnac addressed to her. In a few minutes the ring broke up, and then she approached Louise Gauthier, and said hurriedly through her mask,—

"You cannot tell to what lengths of debauchery this reckless party may proceed. If you value your happiness, follow me directly, without a word or sign to anybody."

Louise fancied she recognised the voice; but the circumstance of one like the marchioness being in such a company appeared utterly improbable. She was also too anxious to escape from the hôtel; and as Marie seized her arm, she implicitly followed her to the door.

"Stop, *mes belles!*" cried Lauzun; "we cannot part yet: you may not be spared so early."

"I am faint with the heat," replied the marchioness, "and only wish to go into the cool air for a minute: it will revive me."

They passed out upon the top of the staircase; and then, as soon as the curtain had fallen back over the doorway, Marie told Louise to keep close to her, as she descended rapidly into the courtyard. They passed out at the *porte cochère* unnoticed; and, finding a carriage at the corner of the Rue St. Jacques, the marchioness made Louise enter, and, following herself, gave the word to the coachman to drive to her house in the Rue St. Paul.

CHAPTER XXV.

MARIE HAS LOUISE IN HER POWER.—THE LAST CAROUSAL.

Not a word was exchanged between Marie and Louise Gauthier during their journey from the Hôtel de Cluny to the Rue St. Paul. Once only was the silence broken, when the marchioness desired the driver, with some impatience, to urge his horses onward with something more of speed than the leisurely progression which then, as now, was the chief attribute of the *voitures de remise* of the good city of Paris. During this period she never removed the mask from her face, and Louise was not particularly anxious to know the station of her new acquaintance. It was sufficient cause for congratulating herself, to find that she was away from the trysting-place of Lauzun's debauched companions, and once more breathing the pure air of the streets, instead of the tainted atmosphere of the hôtel.

The Pont de la Tournelle was at that period the highest up the river, with respect to the stream, for crossing to the other side; now, the bridges of Austerlitz, Constantine, and Bercy span the Seine beyond this, which still exists. The carriage lumbered across the Ile St. Louis, and traversing the other arm of the river by the Pont Marie, passed along the quay, until it stopped at the Hôtel D'Aubray in the Rue St. Paul.

As they stopped at the *porte cochère*, the marchioness looked out, and perceived, to her dismay, that it was open, and that the windows which opened into the court were lighted up, whilst forms could be seen passing and repassing, showing that there was a large company assembled within.

The vehicle had scarcely arrived at the foot of the staircase when Marie's own maid, Françoise Roussel, appeared at the entrance. The light of the carriage-lamp fell upon

her face, which was ghastly pale, and, to all appearance, distorted with pain. She was breathing in agony, and could not speak for some seconds after she had opened the door.

"Heaven be praised that you are returned, madame!" at length she said. "Your brothers have come back from Offemont this evening, with a party of gentlemen living near the château. Monsieur François inquired after you; but I told him you had retired."

"Something ails you, Françoise," observed the marchioness. "Are you ill?"

"I have been in agony, madame, the whole afternoon, as if I had swallowed some pins that were red-hot."

"You have taken something that has done you harm," continued Marie, as she descended from the carriage. "What have you eaten to-day?"

"Nothing, madame," replied her domestic, "but the confiture you gave me for breakfast; and that could not have hurt me."

"Oh no," answered Marie, as if she thought the subject too insignificant for further notice. But, after a moment or two, she added, "Besides, I partook of that myself, you know."

As she spoke, she turned a gaze of the most intense scrutiny upon Françoise's face; but no trace of any emotion would have been visible upon her own features, had she been unmasked. Then bidding Louise, who was reassured by the apparent respectability of the house, to follow her, they went up stairs, preceded by the panting girl, who could scarcely hold the light lamp she carried before them.

As she reached her chamber,—the one in which her interview with Sainte-Croix took place, after the scene at Theria's apartments, that in its sequel led to so much of crime and misery,—she took a small cabinet down from the top of a bureau, and opening it, discovered a row of little bottles. From one of these she let fall a few drops of some colourless fluid into a glass of water, and told Françoise to drink it, when she would, without doubt, experience immediate relief. The girl took the draught

and swallowed it,—in the course of a minute or two declaring herself to be comparatively free from pain, as she poured forth expressions of gratitude to her mistress for this prompt remedy. She was then told that she might retire to bed, without any fear of a recurrence of her malady; and she accordingly withdrew.

No sooner had the door closed upon her than Marie took the mask from her face, and advancing towards Louise, who was standing close to the mantelpiece, where she had kept during the short conversation between Françoise and her mistress, seized her arm, and, looking full at her, exclaimed,—

"Do you recollect me? We met before at Versailles."

"You are the Marchioness of Brinvilliers," replied the Languedocian, after a momentary start of surprise, in a tone the calmness of which astonished Marie. And she endeavoured to withdraw her arm.

"Stop," replied the marchioness; "we do not part yet." And she dragged her companion after her towards the door, turning the heavy lock, and withdrawing the key. "There!" she continued, "see how useless it is for you to attempt to leave me—how completely you are in my power. Now, listen to me, and attend as you would to the exhortations of a priest upon your dying bed."

She threw the arm of Louise from her grasp, and regarded her for a few seconds with a look of the deadliest hate. The beauty of her features had disappeared in the contortions produced by the passions that were working within her; the terrible impassibility of her countenance gave way, and she gazed at Louise with an expression that was almost fiendish.

"I have you, then, at last," she continued, in a low, deep voice, which, in spite of all her efforts, betrayed her emotion by its quivering. "The only amulet that could charm away Sainte-Croix's affections is in my grasp. I can destroy it—with as little care as I would the paltry charm of a mountebank; and, when it is once disposed of, I can reign—alone—and queen of all his love. Do you understand me?"

"How have I interfered with you?" returned the Lan-

guedocian. "I never knew you until we met at Versailles, when I first learned by whom Gaudin's love—or rather the feeling which I took for love—had been estranged from me. I did not wish to cross your path again. Heaven knows it was not my own doing that I met you this evening."

She spoke these words in a tone that the marchioness had hardly looked for. But Louise, gentle and retiring as was her nature, felt in whose presence she now stood, and her spirit rose with the circumstances, until her eye kindled and her cheek flushed with the emotion of the interview. She was no longer the pale and trembling girl; she felt that Marie had crushed her, by weaning away Gaudin's affections, and she replied accordingly.

Marie was astonished at the manner in which she spoke. She went on: —

"You appear to forget in whose presence you now are, or you would not so address me."

"It is from feeling too keenly whom I thus address that I do so," replied Louise. "What would you have me say?"

"I would have you recollect the wide difference that exists between our positions," answered Marie. "I am the Marchioness of Brinvilliers."

"We ought to know no difference of rank," returned Louise; "a hapless attachment has placed us all on the same level. Whatever Gaudin's station is, or may have been, his love raised me to his own position — one which the Marchioness of Brinvilliers did not think beneath her. I thought she would have been above so petty a cause for quarrel."

"And from these set speeches," rejoined Marie, "which, doubtless, have been conned over until you got them by heart, to make an effect when they might be called for, you have lowered yourself. Sainte-Croix has long since forgotten you. Have you no spirit, thus to pursue a bygone lover who has discarded you?"

"Alas, madame! I have loved!" said Louise, with a tone so tearful, so hopeless, but so firm, that the marchioness paused, baffled in her plans of attack, but not

knowing what new ground to take up. Louise continued, after a short silence, — "And if love with a great lady be what it is to me, a poor country girl, you would not ask me why, despite Gaudin's neglect, I still hang upon the memory, not of him, but of the love he first taught me to feel."

As she spoke she sunk her face in her hands, and her tears flowed fast and freely.

The marchioness paced impatiently up and down the room. At length, stopping before the seat on which Louise had fallen, she said abruptly,

"Will you root out this passion?"

"I cannot," replied the Languedocian through her tears.

"Then life and it must end together," said the marchioness, half interrogatively.

"It may be so," said Louise. But immediately, as if suddenly awakened to a new import in the words, shading her long hair from her face, she exclaimed,

"You would not kill me!"

A strange slow smile crept over Marie's face, which had by this time recovered its usual stony impassiveness, as she said,

"We are rivals!"

But as Louise's eyes were fixed on her with a look of wonderment, at that moment a sudden burst of laughter from the room on the opposite side of the landing, in which François and Henri D'Aubray, with their companions, were carousing, arrested the attention of the marchioness. She walked to the door, unclosed it, and listened. A voice was heard proposing the toast, "Success to your *début* as a creditor, and a long incarceration to Sainte-Croix!" Then followed the clink of glasses, and the *vivas* of the guests as they honoured the pledge.

The marchioness turned pale, and clenched the handle of the door she held until the blood forsook her fingers; she appeared to forget the presence of Louise; and reclosing the door, when the noise had subsided, she walked to the bureau, and, opening the box which we have before described, began, half mechanically, to arrange the small vials with which it was filled. All was now silence in the

chamber, broken only by the measured ticking of the pendule on the chimney-piece. It might have lasted some five minutes, when Françoise Roussel entering the room cautiously by the *porte derobée*, whispered her mistress, who flushed at the tidings, and hastily closed the box. Then, opening the door which led to a small room contiguous to the apartment, she said to Louise, —

"In here: not a word—not a motion, as you value life." Louise obeyed mechanically, and as the door closed upon her, Gaudin de Sainte-Croix entered.

Marie threw herself into his arms; all her jealousy for the moment vanished at finding herself once more at his side.

"You are free, then?" she asked, after this passionate greeting.

"For the time, Marie," replied Gaudin. "I have appeased Desgrais with part of the money I raised on your carcanet. I did not find the exempt so relentless as my new creditor, your brother François."

"François!" exclaimed the marchioness. "He is here — in the next room!"

"I knew it," said Sainte-Croix, "or I should not have employed four thousand francs to grease the palm of the exempt. I came to speak with him — to tell him to his teeth that he had disgraced the name of gentleman by that attempt to crush me."

As he spoke he stepped towards the door communicating with the landing-place, as if to carry his threat into execution. Marie laid her hand upon his arm.

"Do not go in, Gaudin," she said: "there will be bloodshed. He is surrounded by his friends and neighbours. You will be murdered!"

"I care not," exclaimed Sainte-Croix, "I shall not fall alone," and he pressed on towards the door.

"There is another way," said Marie, as she pointed to the casket which still stood on her table. "This."

Sainte-Croix gazed at her with a gloomy and meaning smile. "This time," he said, "the suggestion is yours. Be it so: there will be no blood spilled, at all events; and

we may rid ourselves of one who, whilst he lives, must ever be a serpent in our path. Is Henri with him?"

"He is," answered Marie.

"There is enough for two," muttered Sainte-Croix who had taken a phial from its compartment, and was holding it up to the light of the candle.

"Must Henri die too?" said the marchioness. "He is so young — so gay — has been so kind to me. We were almost playmates."

And a trace of emotion passed over her brow.

"Both or neither," replied Sainte-Croix. "Decide at once. I shall await your determination."

And he seated himself at the table, coolly humming the burden of a *chanson à boire*.

There was a fearful struggle in Marie's mind. But the fiend triumphed, and no agitation was perceptible in her voice when, after a moment's reflection, she replied, "Both."

"Now for an agent in the work. You cannot trust any of your own domestics. I foresaw something like this, and have brought my instrument," said Gaudin. He rose, and drawing aside the curtain, beckoned from the window. The signal was answered by a cough from below, and followed by the appearance of Lachaussée, who had evidently expected the summons. He clumsily greeted the marchioness, and, dropping his hat, awaited Gaudin's orders.

"Let Françoise find a livery of your brother's people, and give it to this honest fellow, Marie," said Sainte-Croix.

Marie went to give the order, and Gaudin developed his plan briefly, but clearly, to Lachaussée. It was, to mix with the attendants at the carouse, furnished with the phial, which Sainte-Croix took from the box and gave him; then watching his opportunity, he was to mix a few drops of its contents with the wine of the brothers. Assuming the dress which Françoise soon brought, Lachaussée left the apartment, leaving Sainte-Croix and the marchioness to await the result.

The room in which François and Henri D'Aubray with their country friends were assembled, was large and handsome. Lights sparkled upon the table, and played brilliantly among the flasks, cups, and salvers which covered

it, in all the rich profusion of one of those luxurious suppers which, although not carried to perfection until the subsequent reign, were [already] admirably organised and most popular among the gay youth of the Parisian *noblesse*.

François D'Aubray was seated at the head of a long table; his stern and somewhat sullen features contrasting strongly with the boyish and regular face of his younger brother Henri, who sat on his right. The company consisted almost entirely of provincial aristocracy, — those whose estates joined that of D'Aubray at Offemont, in Compiègne. There was more of splendour than taste in their costumes: the wit was coarser, too, and the laughter louder than Parisian good-breeding would have sanctioned.

"And so you have run down your game at last," said the Marquis de Villeaume, one of the guests, to François.

"Yes, — thanks to Desgrais," was the reply. "Sainte-Croix is at this moment in the hands of the Lieutenant-civil, and, if I know aught of his affairs, he will not soon reappear to trouble the peace of our family."

"*Mon Dieu!* François, you are too severe," gaily interrupted Henri. "Gaudin de Sainte-Croix is a *bon garçon*, after all; and I am half inclined to quarrel with you for tracking him down, as if he were a paltry *bourgeois*."

"Henri," said François, turning sharply towards him; "no more of this. Our sister's honour must not be lightly dealt with. Sainte-Croix is a villain, and deserves a villain's doom."

"A truce to family grievances!" roared a red-faced baron, heavily booted and spurred; one of those Nimrods who were quite as ridiculous, and much more numerous in the France of Louis Quatorze, than their imitators of the "Jockey Club" of the present day. "Debtor-hunting is a bourgeois sport compared to stag-hunting, after all; the only amusement for young gentlemen."

"Where is Antoine Brinvilliers?" asked another guest of François. "He ought to be very grateful to you, for your care of Madame la Marquise's reputation."

"Once for all, messieurs," said François, who turned crimson at the implied taunt: "no more words of our sister, or our family concerns, or bad may come of it."

"A toast!" cried Henri, rising. "*Aux Amours!*"

"In Burgundy!" roared a chorus of voices. "And *les hanapes.*"

The large cups so called — heirlooms in the family of D'Aubray, were brought forward by the attendants. Lachaussée had entered the room whilst the conversation we have narrated was in progress; and, taking his place at the buffet, had silently and sedulously officiated amongst the other attendants, without exciting notice. Almost every guest had his servants there, and such was the confusion of liveries, that the presence of a strange valet, wearing the Brinvilliers' colours, was not likely to call forth remark. He it was, who, taking a bottle of Burgundy, now stationed himself behind the chair of François, who mechanically lifting his cup, did not observe that the hand which filled it held a phial, and that some drops of the contents mingled with the wine.

The number of *hanapes* was four, and they were passed from hand to hand. François, after drinking, handed his to Henri, who honoured his own toast like a hardy drinker. As he passed it to De Villeaume, Lachaussée, pretending to reach over him for something, contrived to knock the goblet from his hand, and spill its contents. A storm of abuse for his awkwardness was the result, under which he managed to leave the room, with as little notice as he had caused by entering it.

Chafed by the wine they had drunk, the mirth of the party waxed wilder and louder. Songs were sung; games at tennis and ombre arranged; bets settled; *parties de chasses* organised. The revelry was at its highest pitch, when a series of loud and sudden shrieks was heard from the staircase. It was a woman's voice that uttered them; and a rush was directly made by the guests in the direction of the sound.

They found Louise Gauthier struggling in the hands of some of the valets on the landing-place. The room into which she had been hurried by the marchioness had another exit, which was unlocked. This she had soon discovered on regaining her presence of mind; and in attempting to leave the hotel by it, she had been seen and rudely

seized by the servants, who were amused by her terror. To D'Aubray's guests, flushed as they were with wine, the sight of a woman was a new incentive, and poor Louise would have fared worse at the hands of the masters than of the servants, had it not been for the interposition of François D'Aubray, who, pressing through the crowd that surrounded the frightened and fainting girl, bade all stand back in a tone that enforced obedience.

"Who are you?" he asked, "and what business brings you here?"

"I am a poor girl; brought here for what reason I know not, by Madame la Marquise, not an hour since," replied Louise, reassured by the calmness of his manner, which contrasted strangely with the wildness and recklessness of all around.

"*Mort de ma vie!* by Madame la Marquise!" cried Henri. "She is here, then?"

"We entered together," said Louise.

"Ha!" exclaimed François, with a savage ferocity, that made him fearful to look upon, "she is playing fast and loose with us. On your life, girl, is this the truth?"

"It is the truth," replied Louise.

"And where is the marchioness?" he asked, thickly, and in a voice almost inarticulate from passion.

"In her apartment, when I left her," said the Languedocian.

"Alone?" asked François.

"Some one entered the room as I quitted it," was the answer.

François D'Aubray hardly awaited her reply. Springing like a tiger across the landing-place to the door of Marie's boudoir, he cried,

"Stand by me, gentlemen, for the honour of Compiègne! De Villeaume! down into the court-yard, and see that no one leaves the hôtel by that way. You, messieurs, guard the issues here. Henri! come you with me."

And he attempted to pass into his sister's apartment.

"Open!" he roared rather than shouted,—"open! harlot! adultress!—open!"

There was no reply. He shook the door, but it was locked within, and resisted his frantic efforts to break it open.

"By the ante-chamber!" said Henri, pointing to the open door by which Louise had arrived. François comprehended the direction, although rage had almost mastered his senses. Rapidly the brothers entered, and, passing through the apartment of Louise's captivity, found the entrance communicating with Marie's boudoir unfastened. Flinging it open, they rushed into the room.

Marie de Brinvilliers was standing by the fire-place, pale, but calm. By the secret door, which he held open, listening to the steps and voices in the court, stood Sainte-Croix, his sword drawn, his teeth set—a desperate man at bay.

François D'Aubray strode across the room, and with his open hand struck his sister on the face, hissing through his clenched teeth, "Fiend!"

Marie uttered no cry, made no motion, though Gaudin, with a terrible oath, sprang forward, and would have run François through the body had not a sign from the marchioness restrained him,

"You — you — Sainte-Croix!" cried Henri, crossing swords immediately with the other, as his brother, stopping short in his progress towards him, reeled and stumbled against the chimney-piece.

"Look to your brother," said Sainte-Croix as he put by the furious thrusts of Henri,—"and to yourself," he muttered, as with a sudden expert wrench he disarmed him.

Marie crossed to Sainte-Croix. "It works," she whispered.

"Henri!" gasped François, as the froth gathered round his leaden lips, and the cold sweat rose in thick beads upon his forehead, "what is this?—Give me some water."

He made a spring at a glass vase that stood on a bracket near him, filled with water; but, as if blinded at the instant, missed his mark, and fell heavily on the floor. His brother raised his arm, and, on letting it go, it sank passively by his side.

"He is dead!" exclaimed Henri, as a pallor, far beyond

that which horror would have produced, overspread his own features.

"It is apoplexy!" said one of the bystanders. "In his passion he has ruptured a vessel of the brain."

The guests crowded round the body. Sainte-Croix and Marie looked at one another as they awaited the pangs of the other victim.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SAINTE-CROIX DISCOVERS THE GREAT SECRET SOONER THAN HE EXPECTED.

A FEW weeks passed, and the terrible events of the last chapter were almost forgotten by the volatile people of Paris, and even by the provincials who had been present at the double tragedy, for Henri D'Aubray had followed his brother, although, from his robust health and strong constitution, he had battled more vigorously against the effects of the poison, his sufferings being prolonged in consequence. It is unnecessary to follow the horrid details of the effect of the Aqua Toffana, or to describe the last agonies, when "il se plaignait d'avoir un foyer brûlant dans la poitrine, et la flamme intérieure qui le devorait semblait sortir par les yeux, seule partie de son corps qui demeurât vivante encore, quand le reste n'était déjà plus qu'un cadavre." It will suffice to say that no suspicion, as yet, rested upon the murderers. The bodies were examined in the presence of the first surgeons of Paris, as well as the usual medical attendants of the D'Aubray family; and, although everywhere in the system traces of violent organic lesion were apparent, yet none could say whether these things had been produced by other than mere accidental morbid causes. Tests would, as in the present day, have soon detected the presence of the poisons—the more readily as they were mostly mineral that were used; but the secret of these reagents remained almost in the sole possession of those

who made them: and the subtlety of some of their toxicological preparations proves that the disciples of Spara were chemists of no mean order.* People wondered for a little while at the coincidence of the several deaths occuring in one family, and in a manner so similar, and then thought no more of the matter. The cemetery received the bodies of the victims: and the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, now her own mistress, and the sole possessor of a magnificent income, shared it openly with Sainte-Croix; and the hôtel in the Rue St. Paul vied with the most celebrated of Paris in the gorgeous luxury of its festivities. But the day of reckoning and heavy retribution was fast approaching.

We have before alluded to the Palais des Thermes, the remains of which ancient edifice may still be seen from the footway of the Rue de la Harpe, between the Rue du Foin and the Rue des Mathurins, as being the most important ruins marking the occupation of Paris by the Romans. The researches of various individuals, from time to time, have shown that this palace was once of enormous extent, extending as far as the small stream of the Seine, which flows beneath the Hôtel Dieu; and, indeed, in the cellars of many of the houses, between the present site of the large *salle* and the river, pillars and vaulted ways, precisely similar to those in the Rue de la Harpe, have been frequently discovered; added to which, before the demolition of the Petit Châtelet, a small fortress at the bottom of the Rue St. Jacques, the remains of some ancient walls were visible running towards the Palais from the banks of the Seine.

There were *souterrains* stretching out in many other directions; the whole of the buildings adjoining were undermined by them, the entrance to the largest having been discovered, by accident, in the courtyard of the Convent des Mathurins, within a few months of the date of our romance. And these must not be confounded with

* Much has been written upon the Aqua Toffana, especially with respect to its alleged power of killing at any interval of time after it had been administered. No drug is now known that would thus exert any species of action. The only example that can be brought forward to support the possible truth of this statement is the poison from the bite of a mad dog, which will remain dormant in the system, it is well known, for several months.

the rough catacombs to which we have been already introduced, hewn in the gypsum as chance directed, but were regularly arched ways from ten to sixteen feet below the surface of the ground, communicating with one another by doors, and supported by walls four feet thick.

The ruins of the Palais des Thermes and the adjoining vaults, although not open to the street as they are at present, had long been the resort of that class of wanderers about Paris now classified as "*Bohemiens*," until an edict drove them to the Catacombs of the Bièvre and the Cour des Miracles to establish their colonies. The shelter of the Palais "favorisent les fréquentes défaites d'une pudeur chancelante" was ordered to be abolished; and the entire place was, in a measure, enclosed and let, at some humble rate, as a storehouse or cellar for the tradesmen in the Rue de la Harpe.

The winter's evening was closing in, cold and dismal, as Gaudin de Sainte-Croix was traversing the streets between the Place Maubert and the Rue de la Harpe, a short time after the events we have described. The front of the Palais des Thermes was at this period concealed from the street by an old dwelling-house, but the *porte-cochére* was always open, and he passed across the court, unchallenged, to the entrance of the large hall that still exists. Here he rang a rusty bell, which had the effect of bringing a man to the wicket, who wore the dress of a mechanic. He appeared to know Sainte-Croix, as he admitted him directly, without anything more than a humble recognition; and then giving him a small end of lighted candle in a split lath, similar to those used in cellars, he left him to go on at his own will.

Gaudin crossed the large *salle*, the sides of which were covered by wine-casks piled one on the other, and entered a small archway at the extremity, which was at the top of a dozen steps. Descending, he went along a vaulted passage, and at last reached a species of cellar, which was fitted up as a laboratory. By the light of the fire alone, which was burning in the furnace, he discovered Exili.

"You have brought my money," said the physician, half interrogatively, as he turned his ghastly features

towards Sainte-Croix. "Five thousand crowns is light payment for the services I have rendered you. It should have been here before."

"I regret that I have not yet got it," answered Gaudin. "The greater part of the possessions which have fallen to Madame de Brinvilliers cannot yet be made available. I went this morning to the Jew who before aided me, on the Quai des Orfèvres, to get some money, but he was from home."

It is true that Sainte-Croix had been in that direction during the day, but it was with a far different object. To elude the payment of Exili's bond he had determined upon destroying him, running the risk of whatever might happen subsequently through the physician's knowledge of the murders. And he had, therefore, ordered a body of the Garde-Royale to attend at the Palais des Thermes that evening, when they would receive sufficient proof of the trade Exili was driving, in his capacity of alchemist.

"It must be paid, however," said Exili, "and by day-break to-morrow morning. Look you, Monsieur de Sainte-Croix, I am not to be put off like your grovelling creditors have been, with your dull, ordinary debts. To-morrow I start for England, and I will have the money with me."

"I tell you I cannot procure it by that time," said Gaudin. "A day can be of no consequence to you."

"No more than it may be a matter of life or death, — a simple affair, I grant you, with either of us, but still worth caring for. Ha! what is this?"

He had purposely brushed his hand against Sainte-Croix's cloak, and in the pocket of it he felt some weighty substance. The chink assured him it was gold.

"You cannot have that," said Gaudin, confusedly; "it is going with me to the gaming-table this evening. Chavagnac has promised me my revenge at De Lauzun's."

"You have rich jewels, too, about you," continued Exili, peering at him with a fearful expression. "The carcanet, I see, has been redeemed, and becomes you well. That diamond clasp is a fortune in itself."

The gaze of the physician grew every moment more peculiar, as he gazed at Gaudin's rich attire.

"Beware!" cried Sainte-Croix: "if you touch one, I will hew you down as I would a dog. Not one of them is mine. They belong to the Marchioness of Brinvilliers."

"Nay," replied Exili, changing his tone, "I did but admire them. Come, then, a truce to this. Will you promise me the sum named in the bond, to-morrow?"

"To-morrow you shall have it," said Sainte-Croix.

"I am satisfied," said the physician. "I was annoyed at the moment, but it has passed."

And he turned round to the furnace to superintend the progress of some preparation that was evaporating over the fire.

"What have you there?" asked Gaudin, who appeared anxious to prolong the interview, and carry on the time as he best might.

"A venom more deadly than any we have yet known — that will kill like lightning, and leave no trace of its presence to the most subtle tests. I have been weeks preparing it, and it approaches perfection."

"You will give me the secret?" asked Gaudin.

"As soon as it is finished, and the time is coming on apace. You have arrived opportunely to assist me."

He took a mask with glass eyes from a shelf, and tied it round his face.

"Its very sublimation, now commencing, is deadly," continued Exili; "but there is a medicated veil in the nostrils of this mask to decompose its particles. If you would see the preparation completed you must wear one as well."

Another visor was at his side. Under pretence of re-arranging the string he broke it from the mask, and then fixed it back with some resinous compound that he used to cover the stoppers of his bottles, and render them air-tight. All this was so rapidly done that Sainte-Croix took no notice of it.

"Now, let me fix this on," said Exili, "and you need not dread the vapour. Besides, you can assist me. I have

left some drugs with the porter which I must fetch," he continued, as he cautiously fixed the visor to Sainte-Croix's face.

"I will mind the furnace whilst you go," said Gaudin, as he heard an adjacent bell sound the hour at which he had appointed the guard to arrive. "There is no danger in this mask, you say?"

"None," said Exili. "You must watch the compound narrowly as soon as you see particles of its sublimation deposited in that glass bell which overhangs it. Then, when it turns colour, remove it from the furnace."

Anxious to become acquainted with the new poison, and in the hope that as soon as he acquired the secret of its manufacture, the guard would arrive, Gaudin promised compliance gladly. Exili, on some trifling excuse, left the apartment; but, as soon as his footfall was beyond Sainte-Croix's hearing, he returned treading as stealthily as a tiger, and took up his place at the door, to watch his prey. Gaudin was still at the furnace, fanning the embers with the cover of a book, as he watched the deadly compound in the evaporating dish. At last, the small particles began to deposit themselves on the bell-glass above, as Exili had foretold, and Gaudin bent his head close to the preparation to watch for the change of colour. But in so doing, the heat of the furnace melted the resin with which the string had been fastened. It gave way, and the mask fell on the floor, whilst the vapour of the poison rose full in his face, almost before, in his eager attention, he was aware of the accident.

One terrible scream—a cry which once heard could never be forgotten—not that of agony, or terror, or surprise, but a shrill and violent indrawing of the breath, resembling rather the screech of some huge hoarse bird of prey, irritated to madness, than the sound of a human voice, was all that broke from Gaudin's lips. Every muscle of his face was at the instant contorted into the most frightful form: he remained for a second, and no more, wavering at the side of the furnace, and then fell heavily on the floor. He was dead!

Exili had expected this. His eagerness would hardly

restrain him from rushing upon Sainte-Croix as he fell; and scarcely was he on the ground when the physician, dashing the rest of the poison from the furnace, darted on him like a beast of prey, and immediately drew forth the bag of money from his cloak, and transferred it to his own pouch. He next tore away every ornament of any value that adorned Gaudin's costly dress; finally taking the small gold heart which hung round his neck, inclosing the morsel of pink crystal, which had attracted Exili's attention the first night of his sojourn in the Bastille. As he opened it to look at the beryl, he observed a thin slip of vellum folded under it within the case, on which were traced some faint characters. By the light which Sainte-Croix had brought with him, and which was burning faintly in the subterraneous atmosphere, he read the following words with difficulty: —

"Beatrice Spara to her child, on the eve of her execution. Rome, A.D. 1642. An amulet against an evil eye and poisons."

A stifled exclamation of horror, yet intense to the most painful degree of mental anguish, escaped him as the meaning came upon him. For a few seconds his eyes were riveted on the crystal, as if they would start from his head; his lips were parted, and his breath suspended. Then another and another gasping cry followed; again he read the lines, as though he would have altered their import; but the simple words remained the same, and fearful was their revelation, — until, covering his face with his hands, he fell on his knees beside the body. Gaudin de Sainte-Croix — the unknown adventurer — the soldier of fortune, whom nobody had ever dared to question respecting his parentage, was his own son! — the fruit of his intimacy with the Sicilian woman, from whom at Palermo he had learned the secrets of his hellish trade, in the first instance to remove those who were inimical to the *liaison*. The child was not above two years old when he himself had been compelled to fly from Italy; and he had imagined that, after her execution, the infant had perished, unknown and uncared for, in the streets of Rome.

For some minutes he remained completely stupified, but

was aroused at last by a violent knocking at the door of the vault; and immediately afterwards the man who owned the house in the Rue de la Harpe rushed in, and announced the presence of the guard, who, not finding Sainte-Croix to meet them, as they expected, had made the cooper conduct them to Exili's laboratory. He had scarcely uttered the words when their bristling halberds, mingling with torches, appeared behind him.

"Back!" screamed Exili as he saw the guard, — "keep off! or I can slay you with myself, so that not one shall live to tell the tale."

The officer in command told the men to enter; but one or two remembered the fate of those in the boat-mill whom the vapour had killed, and they hung back.

"Your lives are in my hands," continued the physician, "and if you move one step they are forfeited. I am not yet captured."

He darted through a doorway at the end of the room as he spoke, and disappeared. The guard directly pressed onward; but as Exili passed out at the arch, a mass of timber descended like a portcullis, and opposed their further progress. A loud and fiendish laugh sounded in the *souterrain*, which got fainter and fainter, until they heard it no more.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MATTERS BECOME VERY SERIOUS FOR ALL PARTIES. — THE DISCOVERY AND THE FLIGHT.

"Ah!" said Maître Picard, with a long expression of comfortable fatigue, and the same shudder of extreme enjoyment which he would have indulged in, had he just crept into a bed artificially warmed, "Ah! it is a great thing to enjoy yourself, having done your duty as a man and a Garde Bourgeoise!"

And he sank into an easy chair in which he would have been hidden but for his rotundity, and propping up his little legs with another seat, lighted a mighty pipe, the bowl whereof was fashioned like a dragon's head which vomited forth smoke from its nostrils in a manner terrible to behold.

It was a cold night. There were large logs of wood blazing and crackling up the chimney, from the iron dogs; and amongst the glowing embers that surrounded them various culinary utensils were imbedded, some of which sent forth fragrant odours of strong drinks or savoury extracts, whilst on a spit, formed of an old rapier, was impaled a pheasant, which the Gascon, Jean Blacquart, was industriously turning round as he sat upon the floor with his back against the chimney-projection, humming a student's song, to which he made the bird revolve, in proper measure.

Every thing looked very comfortable. The cloth was laid for supper, and bright pewter vessels and horn mugs with silver rims caught the light from the fire, which likewise threw its warm glow upon the ceiling, and made the shadows dance and flicker on the walls. It was not so pleasant without. The frost was hard; the snow fell heavily; and the cold wind came roaring up the narrow streets, chasing all the cut-purses and evil company before it, much readier than all the guards of the night could have done, even at the points of their halberds.

"I think you might change your love-song for a sprightly dance, Jean," said Maître Picard. "Your tender pauses, during which the spit stops, do but scorch the breast of the bird, whilst the back profits not."

"It is an emblem of love, in general," replied the Gascon; "seeing that our breast is doubly warmed thereby, whilst our back comes off but badly, especially if our sweetheart is expensive, and requires of one the price of three doublets to make one robe."

"I was in love once," said Maître Picard, "but it is a long time ago. It wastes the substance of a portly man. Had I not eaten twice my ordinary allowance I should have fallen under the attack. The presents, too, which I

offered to my lady were of great value, and none were ever returned."

"I never give presents," observed the Gascon, "for I have found in many hundred cases that my affection is considered above all price, and received as such."

"But suppose a rival of more pretensions comes to oppose you?" said Maître Picard.

"I never had a rival," said Blacquart grandly; "and I never shall. Admitting one was to presume and cross my path, he would find no ordinary antagonist. With this stalwart arm and a trusty blade, I would mince him before he knew where he was." And, in his enthusiasm, he caught hold of the handle of the rapier, which formed the spit, and brandished it about, perfectly forgetting the presence of the pheasant, and firmly convinced that his chivalric energies were really in action. He took no heed of the remonstrance of Maître Picard, until a sudden and violent knocking at the street door so frightened him in the midst of his imaginary bravery, that he let the rapier fall, and bird, spit, and all tumbled on the floor.

"*Cap de dis!* it made me jump," observed the Gascon. "What can it be, at this time of night?"

"You can find out if you go and see," replied Maître Picard from behind his pipe.

"Suppose it should be some wickedly-disposed students come again to vex us?" suggested Blacquart, "and they were to bind me hand and foot. What would become of you without my protection? — Ugh!"

The last exclamation was provoked by a repetition of the knocking more violent than ever.

"Go and open the door!" roared Maître Picard, until he looked quite apoplectic. "No one is out to-night for their own amusement, depend upon it."

With a great disinclination to stir away from the fireplace, the Gascon advanced towards the door. But, before he opened it, he inquired with much assumption of courage,

"Who's there?"

"It is I, Philippe Glazer," said a well-known voice.

"Are you dead or deaf, not to let me in? Open the door; quick;—quick!!"

Re-assured by the announcement, Blacquart soon unbarred the door, and Glazer hastened into the apartment. He was scarcely dressed, having evidently hurried from home in great precipitancy.

"Maître Picard!" he exclaimed, "you must come over with me directly to the Place Maubert. A terrible event has come about. M. Gaudin de Sainte-Croix—"

"Well, what of him?" asked the bourgeois, aroused from his half-lethargy of comfort and tobacco by Glazer's haggard and anxious appearance.

"He is dead!" replied Philippe. "He lodged with us, or rather had a room to carry on his chemical experiments, and we have just heard that his body has been found lifeless, in the vaults of the Palais des Thermes."

"Murdered?" asked both the Gascon and Maître Picard at once.

"I know not," answered Glazer: "a hundred stories are already about, but we are too bewildered to attend to any. However, he has left nearly all his possessions in our keeping, and we must immediately seal them up until the pleasure of the authorities be known."

"It is the office of the commissary of police of the quartier," said Maître Picard.

"I know it," answered Glazer: impatiently. "But M. Artus is ill in bed, and he has deputed you to witness the process, as a man of good report in his jurisdiction. His clerk, Pierre Frater, has started to our house. I pray you come, without more loss of time."

It was a sad trial for Maître Picard to leave his intended banquet, especially to the mercies of the Gascon, whose appetite, in common with that pertaining to all weakened intellects, was enormous. But the urgency of the case, and Philippe Glazer's *empressement*, left him no chance of getting off the duty; and, hastily gathering together his cloak, arms, and other marks of his authority, he turned out, not without much grumbling, to accompany Glazer to his father's house in the Place Maubert, which was not above ten minutes' walk from the Rue des Mathurins.

Late as it was, the news of Sainte-Croix's death had travelled over that part of Paris contiguous to the scene of the event: and when Philippe and the bourgeois arrived the court was filled with people, who had collected, in spite of the inclemency of the weather, to gain some authentic intelligence connected with the catastrophe. The fact that Exili was, in some way or another, connected with the accident, had already given rise to the most marvellous stories; the principal one being that the devil had been seen perched on the northern tower of Notre Dame, with the wretched physician in his grasp, preparatory to carrying him off to some fearful place of torment, the mention of which provoked more crossings and holy words than all the masses which the gossipers had attended for the last week.

Elbowing his way through the throng, Maître Picard assumed all his wonted importance, whilst he ordered Philippe to admit no one but the members of his household; and then, accompanied by Pierre Frater, the commissary's clerk, he ascended to the room which Gaudin had occupied.

It teemed with that fearful interest which sudden death throws around the most unimportant objects connected with the existence of the victim. The pen lay upon the half-finished letter; a list of things to be attended to on the morrow was pinned to the wall; and the watch was ticking on its stand, although the hand that had put it in action was still and cold. On the table were some dice, at which their owner had evidently been working, to render their cast a certainty at the next game of hazard he engaged in. A flagon of wine, half emptied, a book marked for reference, a cloak drying before the expiring embers of the fire-place, each inanimate article spoke with terrible meaning.

"You have the seals, Maître Frater," said the bourgeois; "we will secure everything until we have further orders."

The clerk of the commissary produced the official seal, together with some long strips of parchment to bind them together; and, assisted by Philippe, they proceeded to attach them to everything of importance in the room.

But whilst they were thus engaged, a confused murmur was heard in the court below, and Maître Picard, looking from the window, saw a carriage drive through the *porte cochère* as hastily as the snow would permit. A man sprang from it, closed the door after him, and the next minute came up the staircase hurriedly, and almost forced his way into the room.

"There is no admittance, monsieur," said the little bourgeois, presenting his halberd.

But the intruder was already in the centre of the chamber.

"I am the valet of M. de Sainte-Croix, and my name is Lachaussée," he said. "I oppose this proceeding of sealing up his effects."

"On what grounds?" asked the clerk Frater.

"Because there is much that is my own property," replied Lachaussée. "You will find one hundred pistoles, and the same number of silver crowns in a canvas bag, in that bureau. My master gave them to me, and promised still further to transfer three hundred livres to me. You will, without doubt, find that he has done so; if he has not, you may depend upon my word that everything is right which I have stated."*

"We do not doubt your word, monsieur," said the clerk; "but we cannot, at present, give up to you so much as a pin from this room. When the seals are broken by the authorities, whose servants we merely are, and under whose orders we now act, you may rest assured that the interests of no one will be overlooked."

* This, and many of the incidents about to follow, the author has taken from some decayed and mouse-eaten pamphlets in his possession, bearing the date of the trial, which he was fortunate enough to find, some time back, at a book-shop in the neighbourhood of the Rue de l'Ecole de Médecine, Paris. By the similarity of the pages and references, they appear to be the same from time to time referred to by M. Alexandre Dumas, in the *Crimes Célebres*; and two bear imprint, "A Paris. Chez Pierre Aubouin, Cour du Palais, et, chez Jacques Villery, rue Vieille Bouclerie." One is a memoir of this extraordinary "*procez*;" the second is a copy of the sentence, much dilapidated; and the third is the defence of M. Nivelle.—"De l'imprimerie de Thomas Le Gentil,"—in excellent preservation. They were all published before the *dénouement* of the terrible drama. The following extract from the end of the "Mémoire" is not without interest:—"Le Public en attend la décision avec la mesme impatience que chacun a pour ce qui doit contribuer à sa sûreté et à son repos. Il espére que MESSIEVRS qui ont travaillé avec tant de précaution à pénétrer les circonstances d'une affaire aussi importante, en punissant la coupable par leur arrest, préviendront de pareils crimes, d'autant plus dangereux qu'ils sont secrets et inévitables."

"But this is such a trifle: you surely will not put me to such great inconvenience, for such it will be," answered Lachaussée, changing his tone.

"We regret it," answered Maître Picard with much grandeur, now he had heard from Pierre Frater what he was to say; "we regret it; but, at present, the law is peremptory."

"If I have no influence with you," said Lachaussée, "I will bring hither one who, possibly, may have some."

Before they had time to reply, he left the room, and in the course of a minute returned, bringing back with him, to the astonishment of every one present, the Marchioness of Brinvilliers.

Marie was pale as marble. Her beautiful hair, usually arranged with such careful taste, was hanging about her neck and shoulders in wild confusion: her eyes glistened, and her lips were blanched and quivering. She had evidently left home hurriedly, wrapping about her the first garments that came to hand, which she drew closely round her figure, from the inclemency of the weather. And yet, looking as she then did, the picture of agony and consternation, from time to time she made visible efforts to master her excitement, and with that habitual duplicity which had long become her nature, to deceive those with whom she was confronted, respecting the real state of her feelings.

She looked wildly at the assembled party as she entered, and at last her eye fell upon young Glazer, whom she was well acquainted with, as we have already seen. Glad to meet with any one who knew her, under such circumstances, she directly went towards him, and caught his arm for support, exclaiming, in a hollow and trembling voice —

"O Philippe! — you know all, — this is indeed terrible!"

Glazer addressed a few common-place words of consolation to her; but ere she had finished, an access of violent hysterics placed the terrified woman beyond the comprehension of his words. He supported her to a chair, and Frater, Picard, and their attendants gathered round her in silence, as they watched her convulsed form with feelings of real pity; for the attachment existing between Gaudin

and herself was now no secret. The only one perfectly unmoved was Lachaussée, and he regarded her with an expression of unconcern, showing that he doubted the reality of the attack.

In a few minutes she recovered; and starting up from her seat, addressed herself to Pierre Frater, who, from his clerkly look, her perception enabled her to tell was the chief person in authority.

"Monsieur," she said, "I know not what Lachaussée has sought to obtain; but there is a small box here belonging to me alone, which I presume there will be no objection to my carrying away with me. Philippe Glazer may divine the nature of the papers it contains. He will explain it to you."

"Madame," replied the clerk, "it pains me to repeat the same answer to you which I gave to the valet of M. de Sainte-Croix; but nothing can be moved except with the consent of the commissary, my master."

"Nothing of M. de Sainte-Croix's property, I am aware," replied the marchioness: "but this is mine—my own,—do you understand? See! there it is!—you must give it to me,—indeed, indeed you must."

As she spoke she pointed to the small inlaid cabinet which has been before alluded to, and which was visible behind the glass-front of a secretary between the windows. She repeated her request with renewed energy. And well, indeed, she might; for it was that box which had furnished the most terrible poisons to her victims.

"Indeed, madame," answered Frater, firmly but respectfully, "you cannot have it at this moment."

"You must give it to me!" she exclaimed, seizing the clerk by the hand. "It contains a matter of life and death, and you cannot tell whom it may affect. Give me the box; my position and influence will free you from any responsibility for so doing. You see, the seals have not yet been put on the bureau; it can be of no consequence to you in the discharge of your duty. Let me have it."

She let go his hand and went towards the bureau. But Frater stepped before her, as he exclaimed:—

"Pardon me, madame; and do not oblige me to forget

my gallantry, or that politeness which is due to a lady of your station, by forgetting your own proper sense. The cabinet can only be delivered up to you upon the authority of M. Artus."

"And where is he?" she inquired hurriedly.

"He is ill—at his house in the Rue des Noyers," answered the clerk. "To-morrow he will, without doubt, give you every assistance."

"To-morrow will be too late!" exclaimed Marie. "I must see him now—this instant. *Au revoir*, messieurs; I shall hope in a few minutes to bring you his order that you may deliver me my cabinet."

And without any further salute she turned and left the room, requesting Lachaussée to await her return.

Her exceeding anxiety was placed to the score of her attachment to Sainte-Croix; and as she quitted the apartment the others went on with their duties in silence. Lachaussée seated himself in a recess of the chamber and watched their proceedings; and Philippe collected a few things together which belonged to his father, and consisted principally of some chemical glasses and evaporating dishes, placing them in a box by themselves to be moved away as soon as it was permitted.

But scarcely five minutes had elapsed ere another carriage drove into the court, and Desgrais, the active exempt of the Maréchaussée, came up stairs to the apartment, followed by one or two agents of the police. As he entered the room, he cast his eye over the different pieces of furniture, and perceiving that the judicial seal was already upon many of them, nodded his head in token of approval. Then turning to Philippe, he said,—

"Monsieur Glazer, there will be no occasion to inconvenience you by detaining your own goods. Whatever you will describe as yours, shall be at once made over to you, on your signature."

"You are very good," replied Philippe; "but everything belonging to us, in the care of this poor gentleman, was of little consequence. There is, however, that little cabinet, which may be returned to its owner, who is most

anxious to have it. It has been earnestly claimed by the Marchioness of Brinvilliers."

"The Marchioness of Brinvilliers!" exclaimed Desgrais with some emphasis. "And you say she was anxious to carry it away?"

"Just as I have told you: in fact, her solicitude was remarkable."

Desgrais was silent for a minute.

"Stop!" at length he said; "we will examine this cabinet that appears so precious. I have reasons for it."

By his directions Pierre Frater took down the inlaid box from its shelf, Maître Picard being too short, and placed it on the table. The others collected eagerly round, especially Lachaussée, who at the first mention of it had left his seat. Sainte-Croix's keys were discovered in one of the drawers of the table, and Desgrais selecting one of curiously-wrought steel, applied it to the lock. The lid instantly flew open.

"Here is a false top," said Desgrais, "with a written paper lying open upon it. Let us see what it says."

And taking the document, he read as follows:—

"'I humbly ask of those into whose hands this cabinet may fall, whoever they may be, to deliver it to the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, at present living in the Rue Neuve St. Paul; since its contents are of importance to her alone, and, her welfare apart, cannot be of the slightest interest to any one in the world. Should she have died before me, let the cabinet be burnt, exactly as it is, without opening it, or disturbing its contents.'

"The paper concludes," continued Desgrais, "with an appeal to God respecting the sincerity of this request, and a half-implied malediction upon those who may refuse to grant it."

"I presume, monsieur, now that your curiosity is satisfied thus far, I may take the box with me to Madame de Brinvilliers," said Lachaussée.

"Stop!" replied the exempt, as the other stretched forth his hand, "here is another paper. It is a receipt for a sum of money delivered, on account of work performed, and signed 'Lachaussée.'"

As his name was pronounced, Lachaussée fell back from the table, and, muttering a few indistinct words, approached the door; but Desgrais cried out,—

"You appear interested in this affair, monsieur, and cannot yet leave us. Guards, place yourselves at the doorway, and let no one pass but with my orders."

Two of the patrol who had entered with the exempt, took up their station at the door, crossing their halberds before it. A dead silence reigned, and the curiosity of all was raised to the most painful intensity. Lachaussée leant back against the bureau, and, folding his arms, gazed steadily at the proceedings, but no visible token betrayed his emotion.

"This affair requires some little extra investigation," said Desgrais. "This false lid must open with a spring, as there is neither lock nor handle to it." He held the cabinet up, and turning it round, discovered one of the studs that ornamented it of a darker colour than the rest, as if from constant handling. His experienced eye told him that this should be the one; he pressed it accordingly, and the partition turned up with a jerk against the side. A single and hurried expiration escaped his lips. He inverted the cabinet, and turned its contents on the table: they consisted of a number of little packets, boxes, and phials, mostly sealed up, and distinguished by various inscriptions.

"'Sublimate!' 'Vitriol!' 'Opium!'" exclaimed Desgrais, as he read each aloud. "*Mort bleu!* messieurs, we are about to make some strange discoveries!"

"Will you allow me to pass," said Philippe Glazer to Desgrais. "I think there is no one below, and I fancied I heard the bell sound."

"Of course," replied the exempt; "but return as soon as you conveniently may. We shall, perhaps, hereafter need you as a witness to these revelations.

Philippe hastily promised compliance, and then quitting the apartment, hastily flew down stairs to his father's shop. The old man had retired to rest early, but his man Panurge was fast asleep upon one of the tables so soundly, that it

required no very gentle treatment from Philippe to waken him.

"Ho! Panurge!" cried his young master, in a sharp, but low voice; "awake, man, unless you wish every wretched bone in your miserable carcase broken. Do you hear me?"

"Hippocrates sayeth that erysipelas upon the baring of a bone is evil," muttered Panurge, who mixed up his sleeping studies with his waking faculties.

"Pshaw!" cried Philippe, "I will give you cause for it all over you if you do not attend. Rouse up, I tell you."

And he gave Panurge such a mighty shake that would have aroused him had he been in a trance. As it was, it immediately restored the assistant to the full exhibition of what faculties he possessed, and he awaited Glazer's further orders.

"You know the house of Monsieur Artus, the Commissary of police, in the Rue des Noyers?"

"I do," replied Panurge; "he hath been ill of a choleric gout, for which we gave him the juice of danewurt—"

"The pest on what you gave him!" said Philippe, "so long as you know where he is to be found. Now look you: go off there directly, and, if you lose no time on the way, you will probably find the Marchioness of Brinvilliers at his house. Give this note to her, and only to her, as you value your useless life."

He hastily wrote on a scrap of paper: —

"The police have found some articles in a cabinet belonging to M. de Sainte-Croix, which may cause you much embarrassment from the publicity it will give to your acquaintance. Be careful how you proceed. "P. G."

"Now, off!" said Philippe, hastily folding the note; "and return here as soon as you leave this in her own hands. Poor lady!" he continued, half speaking to himself; "it would be sorrow indeed, if mere gallantry should link her with the deeds of which her cavalier appears to have been the perpetrator."

Without another syllable, Panurge set off, and Glazer was returning to the room when he met Desgrais descend-

ing the stairs, carrying the cabinet, and followed by two of the police, who had Lachaussée in custody between them. He addressed him:

"We shall require the services of your father and yourself to-morrow, M. Glazer, to analyze these different articles. I have put a seal upon them, and must hold you answerable for their safe keeping."

"I denounce my being kept a prisoner," exclaimed Lachaussée, "as informal and unjust. You have no right to detain me upon the mere circumstance of my name appearing on that piece of paper."

"I will make ample reparation for any wrong I may do you," answered Desgrais, coolly. Then, turning to the guards, he added:

"You will conduct this person to the Châtelet. And now, M. Frater, you can accompany me, with Maître Picard, to the Rue des Noyers without loss of time. We shall, probably, there light upon the Marchioness de Brinvilliers."

Philippe's heart was in his throat as he heard the name pronounced. He immediately endeavoured to contrive some delay in Desgrais's departure; offering him refreshment, begging him to stop whilst the cressets of the watch were retrimmed, and pressing articles of outer wear upon him, by reason of the cold, which he pretended he could not find. A few minutes were gained in this manner, and then the guard departed across the Place Maubert, Philippe's only hope being that Panurge had already got there.

Whilst this scene of fearful interest was being enacted at Glazer's, Marie had reached the house of the Commissary of Police. Some of the domestics were sitting up for further orders from Desgrais, and by them she was informed that M. Artus could not be disturbed. By dint, however, of heavy bribes, giving them all the money she had about her, which was no inconsiderable sum, she was ushered into the apartment of the commissary, and, to him, in a few hurried words, she made known the object of her visit. But her earnestness was so strange, that M. Artus requested she would wait until the next day, when he should have received the report of the proceedings from

his agents. Had she shown less anxiety, he would doubtless have granted what she so urgently desired.

Finding there was no chance of assistance from this quarter, she left the room in an agony of terror, and, scarcely knowing what course to pursue, was about to return to the Place Maubert, when Panurge arrived with Glaser's note. She hastily read it, and the contents struck her like a thunderbolt. "Then all is over!" she exclaimed; and, without exchanging another word with the assistant, or any of the officials, she flew through the streets, half clad as she was, with the snow deep on the ground, and the thoroughfares wrapped in the obscurity of a winter night, in the direction of her hôtel in the Rue St. Paul.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FLIGHT OF MARIE TO LIÈGE. — PARIS. — THE GIBBET OF MONTFAUCON.

Midnight was sounded upon the heavy bell of the Bastille by the sentinel on guard but a few minutes before the Marchioness of Brinvilliers — terrified, breathless, and, in spite of her hurry, shivering in her light dress beneath the intense cold, — arrived at the Hôtel D'Aubray, There were no signs of life in that quarter of Paris, for the inhabitants had long retired to rest: a faint light, gleaming from the front windows of Marie's residence upon the snow that covered the thoroughfare, alone served to guide her to the door. The drowsy *concierge* admitted her, and she hurried across the inner court, and up stairs to her own apartment.

Françoise Roussel, her servant, was waiting up for her. Her mistress had left in such an extreme of anxiety, and half-undressed, that Françoise saw at once an affair of great moment had disturbed her; and now, as Marie returned, the girl was frightened by her almost ghastly look.

As she entered the room she fell panting on one of the *causeuses*, and then her servant perceived that she had lost one of her shoes, and had been walking, perhaps nearly the whole distance from the Place Maubert, with her small naked foot upon the snow, without discovering it. In her hurried toilet, she had merely arisen from her bed, and drawn her shoes on, without any thing else; and throwing a heavy loose robe about her, had thus hurried with Lachaussée to Glazer's house; for from Gaudin's accomplice she had learned the first tidings of his death, and the dangerous position in which she stood. And now, scarcely knowing in the terror and agony of the moment what course to adopt, she remained for some minutes pressing her hands to her forehead, as if to seize and render available some of the confused and distracting thoughts which were hurrying through her almost bewildered brain. A few offers of assistance on the part of her domestic were met with short and angry refusals; and Françoise, almost as frightened as the marchioness herself, remained gazing at her, not knowing what measures she ought next to adopt.

Meanwhile Desgrais, with the important casket, and accompanied by the clerk Frater, and Maître Picard, had reached the house of M. Artus, the commissary of police, in the Rue des Noyers, arriving there not two minutes after Marie had quitted it to regain her own abode. Philippe Glazer had accompanied them, partly from being in a measure an implicated party in the affair, but chiefly out of anxiety for the position of the marchioness, in whose guilt he had not the slightest belief. He was aware of her connection with Sainte-Croix; but this was a matter of simple gallantry, and in the time of Louis Quatorze much more likely to enlist the sympathies of the many on the side of the erring party, than to excite their indignation.

"I suppose you have no further occasion for me?" observed Maître Picard, as he stood at the foot of M. Artus's bed, after having awaited the conclusion of Desgrais's account of the discovery; "because, if you have not, I would fain go home."

The little bourgeois was thinking of the roast pheasant

which he had abandoned to the voracity of the Gascon. He had a wild hope that it might be yet untouched.

"Stop, *mon brave*," said Desgrais. "You cannot leave me until we have found Madame de Brinvilliers. I have only missed her by a few seconds. You must come on with me to her house, where she most likely is by this time."

"I suppose there is no necessity for me to remain here longer," said Philippe Glazer.

"None whatever, monsieur," replied the exempt. "You will take care of M. de Sainte-Croix's property; and we may call upon you to-morrow to analyse the contents of this casket."

Philippe bowed, and left the room. The moment he was clear of the house, having borrowed a lighted lantern from one of the guard, who was at the door, he set off as fast as his legs would carry him towards the Rue St. Paul, having heard enough to convince him that the marchioness was in danger of being arrested. Upon reaching the Hôtel D'Aubray he clamoured loudly for admission. At the sound of the first knock he perceived a form, which he directly recognised to be that of Marie, peep from behind the edge of the curtain and immediately disappear. Some little delay took place before his summons was answered; and then the *concierge*, peering through the half-opening of the door, told him that Madame de Brinvilliers was not within. Pushing the menial on one side, with a hurried expression of disbelief, Philippe forced his way into the court, and perceived, as he entered, the figure of the marchioness hurrying up stairs. He bounded after her, and stood by her side on the landing.

"Philippe!" exclaimed Marie, as she recognised his features. "I was afraid it was Desgrais; and I had gone down to give orders that no one might be admitted."

"You have not on instant to lose," replied young Glazer hurriedly, "and must leave the house in reality. I have just now left them with M. Artus, about to come on and arrest you. You must fly — instantly."

"Fly! by what means?" asked Marie; my horses are at Offemont, except the one at — at *his* house in the Rue

des Bernardins. O Philippe!" she continued, "tell me what to do in this fearful extremity, I know not how to act — I am nearly dead."

All her self-possession — all her duplicity gave way beneath the crushing agony of the moment. She burst into tears, and would have fallen to the ground had not Philippe caught her in his arms.

"Is there nothing in the stables that we can depart with?" asked he of Françoise, who had been watching this short scene with trembling attention. "It will not do to hire a carriage, as that would give a certain clue to our route."

"A man brought a tumbrel here this afternoon, with some things from the country. He has left it, with the horse, in the stables: and sleeps himself at the *Croix d'Or*, in the Rue St. Antoine."

"Bring this light with you, and show me the way," said Philippe, as he placed the marchioness in a *fauteuil*, and hurried down stairs, followed by the *femme de chambre*.

As soon as the girl had indicated the spot, Glazer told her to return to her mistress, and bid her prepare as quickly as she could to leave Paris, taking with her only such few things as were immediately necessary. Next, pulling the drowsy horse from his stall, he proceeded to harness him, as well as his acquaintance with such matters allowed him to do, to the rude country vehicle which Françoise had spoken about. All this was not the work of five minutes; and he then returned to Marie's apartment.

But, brief as the interval had been, Marie had, in the time, recovered her wonted firmness, and, aided by her servant, had rapidly made her toilet, wrapping herself in her warmest garments for protection against the inclemency of the weather. When Philippe entered, he found Françoise occupied in making up a small parcel, half unconscious, however, of what she was doing, from flurry at the evident emergency of the circumstances; and Marie was standing before the fire, watching the destruction of a large packet of letters and other papers, which were blazing on the hearth.

"I am ready, madame," said Philippe: "do not delay your departure an instant longer, or you cannot tell into what perplexities you may fall. Every moment is of untold value."

"Where do you propose to take me?" asked the marchioness earnestly.

"I see no better refuge for the instant than your château at Offemont."

"Offemont!" exclaimed Marie; "it is twenty leagues from Paris; and in this dreadful weather we shall perish on the route."

"It must be attempted," said Philippe: "you say your horses are there; and if we can once reach them, your means of getting to the frontier will be comparatively easy. We must brave everything. Your enemies I know to be numerous in Paris, and you cannot tell what charges they might bring against you when in their power, which it would be next to impossible to refute. Come, come!"

He took her by the hand, and led her to the door, the servant following them closely, and receiving from the marchioness a number of hurried directions and commissions, which it was next to impossible she could remember. As he quitted the room, with some forethought Philippe blew out the candles, and collected the pieces; for the night would be long and dark: there were seven or eight hours of obscurity yet before them. When they got to the court where the horse and tumbrel were, the former evidently in no hurry to depart, young Glazer fastened the lantern he had borrowed from the guard to the side of the vehicle, and then assisted the marchioness to mount, and take her seat upon some straw.

"It is a rude carriage, madame," he said; "but the journey would be less pleasant if it was going to the Place de Grève."

Marie shuddered as he spoke; but it was unobserved in the obscurity. As soon as she was seated, Philippe drew a coarse awning over some bent sticks which spanned the interior; and, making this tight all round, prepared to start.

"Stop!" he exclaimed, as if struck by a sudden thought, "it will be as well to see all clear before us."

And he advanced to the *porte cochère* that opened into the street, when, to his dismay, he perceived the lighted cressets of the Guet Royal coming down the Rue Neuve St. Paul. In an instant he closed the door, and barred it; and, turning to Françoise, exclaimed,

"Go up to the window of your mistress's room, which looks into the road; and when the guard comes, say she is from home."

"There is a court which leads from the stables to the Rue St. Antoine," said the marchioness from the vehicle. "You can get out that way."

"It is lucky," said Philippe, "or we should otherwise have been trapped. Françoise! up, up! and detain them every instant that you can. I will prevent the *concierge* from replying."

He took his handkerchief and hurriedly tied it round the clapper of the bell, which hung within his reach over the porter's lodge. Then, turning round the cart, he led the horse through the inner court and stabling to the passage indicated by the marchioness. Fortunately the snow was on the ground, and there was little noise made beyond the creaking of the vehicle, which in half a minute emerged into the Rue St. Antoine, and Philippe closed the gate behind him.

The thoroughfare was dark and silent; but the snow was falling heavily, as its twinkling by the side of the lantern proved. This was so far lucky, because it would cover up the traces of their route almost as soon as they were made. The fugitives could plainly hear the sound of voices and the clatter of arms in the Rue Neuve St. Paul; and, aware that the delay could only last for a few minutes, Philippe urged on the animal as well as he could, and turned up a small street which ran in a northerly direction from the Rue St. Antoine.

"You are passing the gate," said Marie, who all along had been looking anxiously from the vehicle, as she pointed towards the Bastille, where one or two lights could be

seen, apparently suspended in the air, from the windows of the officials and the guard-room.

"I know it, madame," replied Philippe. "It would not be safe for us to leave the city by that barrier. It is the nearest to your house; and if they suspect or discover that you have left Paris, they will directly conclude it is by the Porte St. Antoine there, and follow you. Besides, we might be challenged by the sentinels."

"You are right," said the marchioness; "the Porte du Temple will be better."

"And, shrouding herself in her cloak, she withdrew under the rough shelter of the tilt; whilst Philippe kept on, still leading the horse, through a labyrinth of small narrow streets, which would have been cut by a line drawn from the Bastille to the Temple. At last he emerged upon the new road formed by the destruction of the fortifications, which we now know as the Boulevards, and reached the gate in question, which he passed through unquestioned by the *gardien*, who merely regarded the little party as belonging to one of the markets. Had he been entering the city instead, he would have been challenged; but, as the authorities did not care what any one took out of it, he was allowed to go on his way, amidst a few houses immediately beyond the barrier, forming the commencement of the Faubourg, until he come into the more open country. Here the reflected light from the white ground in some measure diminished the obscurity. The snow, too, had drifted into the hollows, leaving the road pretty clear; and Philippe clambered on the front of the tumbrel, taking the reins in his hand, and drove on as he best might towards the *grande route*. Not a word was exchanged between these two solitary travellers. Marie kept in a corner of the vehicle, closely enveloped in her mantle; and her companion had enough to do to watch the line they were taking, and keep his hearing on the stretch to discover the first sounds of pursuit.

"*Peste!*" exclaimed Philippe at length, as one of the wheels jolted into a deep rut, and the lantern was jerked off, and its light extinguished; "this is unlucky. We

did not see too well with it, and I don't know how we shall fare now."

He jumped down as he spoke, and tried to rekindle the light with his breath; but it was of no use: he entirely extinguished the only spark remaining. In this dilemma he looked around him, to see if there was a chance of assistance. Marie also was aroused from her silence by the accident, and gazed earnestly from the cart with the same purpose. At last, almost at the same instant, they perceived a thin line of light, as though it shone through an ill-closed shutter, but a little way ahead of them; and the stars, which had been slowly coming out, now faintly showed the outline of a high and broken ground upon their right. At the top of this some masonry and broken pillars were just observable, supporting cross-beams, from which, at certain distances, depended dark, irregularly-shaped objects. It was a gloomy locality, and Philippe knew it well, as he made out the crumbling remains of the gibbet at Montfaucon.

"I should have taken this as a bad omen," said he, half joking, "if the *fourche* had been still in use. It would have looked as though the beam was meant for our destination."

As they approached the small cabin from which the light came, Philippe shouted to awaken the attention of those within; but no answer being returned, he jumped down, and knocked furiously at the door. He heard some whispers for a minute or two, and then a woman's voice demanded, "Who is there?"

"A traveller, who wants a light," cried Philippe, "to guide him safely to Bourget. For pity, madam, don't keep me here much longer, or I must be ungallant, and kick in the door."

There was evidently another conference within, and then the door was cautiously opened. Philippe entered. and his eyes directly fell upon Exili, whilst the female proved to be a woman who was practising fortune-telling in Paris, — it was supposed as a cloak for darker matters, — and was known to some of the people, and to the whole of the police, as La Voisin. The physician and the student

recognised each other immediately, for they had often met on the Carrefours, and each uttered a hurried exclamation of surprise at the rencontre.

"Monsieur Glazer," said Exili, as Philippe took a light from the fire, "you have seen me here, and possibly are acquainted with what has taken place in the Quartier Latin this evening."

"I know every thing," replied Glazer.

"Then I must ask you, on your faith, to keep my secret," said Exili. "You have discovered me in coming here to serve yourself; but this refuge is to me an affair of life and death. You will not betray me?"

"You may trust me," said Philippe carelessly; "and in return, madam," he continued, turning to La Voisin, "if any others should come up, let your story be that you have seen no one this night. Mine also is a case of emergency, and a lady — high-born, rich, and beautiful — is concerned in it."

The woman assured Philippe he might depend upon her secresy; and he was about to depart with his lantern, when Exili stopped him.

"Stay!" he exclaimed earnestly. "Who is it you have with you?" And as he spoke, the strange fire kindled in his falcon eyes, that always bespoke the workings of some terrible passions within.

"It cannot concern you," replied Philippe. "I have got my light, and our interview is concluded."

"Not yet," answered Exili quickly. "A woman — rich, high-born, and beautiful. It is the Marchioness of Brinvilliers!"

And before Philippe could stop him, he rushed forward, and threw open the covering of the cart, discovering Marie still crouching in the corner of the vehicle.

"I have you, then, at last!" he cried, in a voice choking with rage, as he recognised her. "Descend! — fiend! demon! murderess of my son! Descend! for you are mine — mine!"

He was about to climb up the vehicle, when Marie, to whom part of the speech was entirely incomprehensible, shrank to the other side of the tumbrel, and called upon

Philippe to defend her. But this was not needed. The young student had clutched the physician by the neck, and pulled him back on to the ground.

"What do you mean by this outrage, Monsieur?" he asked.

"She is a murderess, I tell you!" he continued hoarsely. "Her damned arts drove my son — him they called Sainte-Croix — to death! She killed him, body and soul, and she belongs to me. I will denounce her to the Chambre Ardente."

"Keep back!" cried Philippe: "you are mad! What has the Marchioness of Brinvilliers in common with yourself?"

"You shall see," answered Exili. "Look there — in the Faubourg — the guard is coming. They have tracked you."

And indeed the lights were visible from the cressets carried by the Guet Royal at the extreme end of the route. Philippe sprung upon the tumbrel as Exili spoke, and tried to proceed; but the other seized the horse's head, and endeavoured to arrest his progress.

"Stand away!" exclaimed young Glazer, "or you are a dead man!"

"I shall not move," was Exili's reply. "I shall be doomed myself, but I will drag her with me to the scaffold. See! they are coming — she is mine!"

His further speech was cut short by Philippe, who, raising his heavy country whip, struck the physician with all his force with the butt-end upon the temple. Exili staggered back, and then the student, lashing his horse furiously, drove from the hovel with tolerable speed, placing the lantern under the covering, that it might not be seen; whilst Marie, without speaking a word, gazed anxiously behind upon the advancing patrol. In a minute, however, a turn of the road shut them from her sight, and the travellers found themselves approaching the Faubourg of La Villette, upon the high road, without the Porte St. Martin.

It was, as Exili had said, a party of the guard who were in pursuit, mounted, and headed by Desgrais. The active

exempt had gone to the Hôtel D'Aubray, as we have seen, and, being at last admitted by Françoise, had seen some traces of a departure on the snow, which had drifted into the sheltered parts of the court. But in the street the fall had covered up the wheel-tracks; and, as the fugitives had conceived, he went directly to the Porte St. Antoine. The sentinel, however, told him that no one had passed the barrier; and he then rode briskly along the Boulevards to the next gate, near the Temple. Here he learned a tumbrel had gone out of the city but a few minutes before his arrival; upon which he divided his troop into two parties, sending one along the road to La Courtille, whilst with the other he took the same line that Philippe had chosen, these being the only two practicable routes for vehicles without the barrier, and, accompanied by the latter escort, he soon arrived at the foot of Montfaucon.

Exili had been stunned for a few seconds by the heavy blow which Philippe Glazer had dealt to him; but, recovering himself before the guard came up, he darted back into the hovel, and, seizing a piece of lighted wood from the hearth, told La Voisin to save herself as she best might, and then scrambled with singular agility up the steep mound at the back of the house, until he reached the stone-work of the gibbet. This was crumbling, and afforded many foot-places by which he could ascend, until he stood between two of the pillars that still supported the cross-pieces, above the hollow way along which Desgrais and his troop were progressing.

The exempt knew the physician directly, as his gaunt form appeared in the lurid light of the cressets, and the rude torch that he himself carried; and he would have ordered the guard immediately to capture him, had not Exili arrested the command by speaking.

"You seek the Marchioness of Brinvilliers," he cried. "She was here not an instant back; and you will find her, if you care to hurry, on the *grande route*."

"I call upon you to surrender yourself my prisoner," said Desgrais, speaking from below; "you may then guide us on the track."

"If I had meant to give myself up," said Exili, "I

should have remained below. I have put you on the scent, and that was all I wanted. Farewell!"

He waved his hand to the officers, and disappeared behind the foundation of the masonry. On seeing this, Desgrais sprang from his horse, and, seizing a cresset from the guard, told one or two of the others to follow him, as he rapidly ascended the mound. He was active, his limbs were well-knit, and a few seconds sufficed to bring him to the spot from whence Exili had spoken; but, as he looked over the area of masonry, not a trace of the physician was visible, except the smouldering brand which he had flung down upon the ground.

The others had arrived at the platform, and, by the additional light from their cressets, Desgrais perceived an opening in the stone-work, conducting below by ragged jutting angles of masonry, and down this he boldly proceeded to venture. It conducted to a terrible spot,—the cemetery of those unfortunates who had perished on the gibbet, into which the bodies were thrown in former times, to make room for fresh victims on the *fourche*. But now the dry bones were all that remained, crushing and rattling beneath the feet of the exempt as he proceeded; for nearly a century had elapsed since the last execution,—that of the wise and just Coligni, during the fiendish massacre of St. Bartholomew. But the place had been undisturbed, time alone having altered its features; the only intruders upon its dreary loneliness being the dogs, and the sorcerers, who came thither for materials to give a horrid interest to their calling, and frighten the vulgar who came to consult them.

By the flaring light of the cressets Desgrais beheld Exili cowering at the end of the vault. His object had evidently been to betray the marchioness, whilst he eluded capture himself; but he had underrated the keen vigilance of the exempt. He had been taken in a trap; and as one or two of the Guet Royal followed Desgrais, he saw that further resistance was useless. He held up his hand to prevent the threatened attack which the others seemed inclined to make; and then, advancing to the exempt, muttered,

"I am your prisoner; take me where you please. The game is up at last."

The party retraced their steps, and descended once more to the by-way of the Faubourgs. Bidding two of the patrol watch Exili, Desgrais next went into the hovel, and ordered the woman to come forth. She immediately obeyed, and made a haughty reverence to the authorities.

"Madame Catherine Deshayes," said Desgrais, "by your name of *La Voisin* you are already under the surveillance of the police. You will please to accompany them at present, until your connexion with the Signor Exili can be explained."

Some of the patrol directly took their places on either side of the woman, and then Desgrais turned to Exili.

"You will stay for to-night," he said, "in the Châtelet: to-morrow other arrangements will be made for your sojourn until the opening of the next chamber at the Arsenal. Two of you," he continued, addressing the guard, "will take charge of the prisoner to Paris."

"Then you will not want me to follow Madame de Brinvilliers!" said Exili.

"We do not now require your aid," was the reply. "Messieurs,—*en route!*"

The guard prepared to mount, when one of them rode, apparently in a great feeling of insecurity, through the little knot of patrol, and approached Desgrais. The lights revealed the form and features of Maître Picard.

"Monsieur," said the little bourgeois, "I fear my horse is tired. I will therefore form one of the escort to take the prisoner to the Châtelet."

"I fear we cannot spare you just yet, *mon brave*," said Desgrais. "You are the only member of the Garde Bourgeois with us, and we may need your authority after mine. You must come on at present."

Maître Picard groaned as he turned his horse's bridle back again. He was evidently ill at ease in the saddle. He could just touch the stirrups—the leathers of which were much too long for him—with the tips of his toes; and as he had not crossed a horse since his grand progress to Versailles, he complained that the action of the present

steed was somewhat too vigorous for him. But he was obliged to obey the orders of the exempt, and fell into the rear accordingly.

"A country cart, drawn by one horse, and covered with a tilt, is the object of our chase," said Desgrais. "It cannot be ten minutes before us. Forward!"

The majority of the guard set off at a smart trot along the hollow way, whilst those who remained placed their prisoners between them, and prepared to return by the Porte du Temple to Paris.

CHAPTER XXIX.

PHILIPPE AVAILS HIMSELF OF MAÎTRE PICARD'S HORSE FOR THE MARCHIONESS.

PHILIPPE GLAZER made the best use of the time taken up in the enactment of this hurried scene. Urging the horse on, he had already left the scattered houses of La Villette behind them, and was now in the open country, hastening as fast as the snow would permit towards Le Bourget, at which village he had an acquaintance who would give him and his companion temporary shelter, and lend him a fresh horse, if requisite. The road was long and straight, and any light could be seen at a great distance. As they proceeded, still in silence, Marie kept watching from the back of the tumbrel, to give the student the first alarm of any indications of pursuit.

"Philippe," at length she exclaimed in a low voice, as though she thought it would be heard in the extreme distance, "they are coming! I can see the lights at La Villette moving. Exili has betrayed us: — what must be done?"

Her conductor jumped down to the ground as she spoke, and looked towards the hamlet, where the cressets were indeed visible. Every moment of advance was now

most precious. He applied the lash with renewed activity to the flanks and legs of the horse, but with little effect. The animal was tired when he started; and the snow was now clogging round the wheels, rendering any material progress beyond his strength. At last, on coming to a deep drift, after a few attempts to drag the tumbrel through, he stopped altogether.

"Malediction!" muttered Philippe through his teeth; "everything is against us."

"They appear to be coming on at a fast trot," exclaimed Marie, as she hastily descended from the vehicle, and stood at the side of the student. "We cannot possibly escape them."

"I am not foiled yet," replied Philippe. "We cannot outrun them, so we must try stratagem."

Fortunately there was a small bye-road running into a species of copse at the way-side, upon which was stored large stacks of firewood. Giving the marchioness his whip, he directed her to flog the horse, whilst he himself with all his power turned one of the wheels. Marie complied — it was no time to hesitate; and by their united efforts they urged the animal forward, turning him off the road towards the copse, behind one of whose wood piles the vehicle was soon concealed.

"Now," he said, "if they do not see us, we are safe."

A few minutes of terrible anxiety supervened as the patrol came on at a rapid pace, their arms clanking and shining in the light of the cressets which one or two of them still carried, blazing brightly as the quick passage through the air fanned up their flames. Sure of the object of their pursuit, as they imagined, they did not pause to examine any of the tracks upon the ground, but were pushing hastily forward towards Le Bourget, where they either expected to come up with the fugitive, or receive information that would speedily place her in their hands. They came on, and were close to the spot where the others had turned off the road. Marie held her breath, and clasped Philippe's arm convulsively; but neither uttered a syllable as their heard them pass, and could distinctly recognise Desgrais's voice.

"They have gone on!" exclaimed the marchioness as the sounds diminished.

"Stop!" said Philippe, drawing her back, for she had advanced beyond their concealment to look after the patrol; "do not move; there are more to come."

As he spoke a horseman came slowly up, who appeared to be lagging behind the rest as a sentinel. The starlight was sufficient to show Philippe that he was alone; and in the stillness the student could hear the rider muttering words of displeasure, and abusing the horse, as he rolled uneasily about on his saddle. He stopped exactly opposite the copse, and for a moment Philippe imagined they were discovered. But he was soon undeceived. The patrol, after vainly endeavouring to tighten his saddle-girths as he sat on the horse, attempted to dismount; but being short and round in figure, he could not well reach the ground from the stirrup, and the consequence was, he rolled down, and over and over in the snow, like a ball.

"*Mort bleu!*" he exclaimed, as under the weight of his accoutrements he with difficulty scrambled on to his legs. "*Pouf!* every bone in my body is broken. *Sacristie!* — miserable beast! how shall I get on you again?"

And he very angrily, but in great fear withal, proceeded to lift up the horse's hoofs, and pick the snow out of them with his halberd, one after another; having accomplished which, he tried to tighten the girths.

"I know the voice," said Philippe; "it is Maître Picard. I shall take his horse."

Pulling his student's cap over his eyes, and disguising his voice, Philippe left the hiding-place, and advanced towards the hapless little bourgeois, — for it was the *chapelier* of the Rue de la Harpe. Maître Picard had laid his halberd on the snow; and Philippe, seizing it before the other was aware of his approach, demanded his money, in the usual tone of a road-marauder."

The bourgeois's first exclamation was one of surprise at the unexpected apparition; but immediately after he began to shout—

"*Aux voleurs!* — help! — murder! — guard!"

"Speak another word, and you shall swallow this halberd," said Philippe. "Give me your arms."

With wonderful celerity Maître Picard proceeded to dispossess himself of all his accoutrements, begging earnestly that his life might be spared, for the sake of his wife and family.

"You are a miserable liar," said Philippe gruffly, "and I have a mind to pin you to a tree." And collecting the arms, he added, "Now stay here an instant. Move at your peril until I return."

He ran back to the cart, and bringing out the lantern, put it in Maître Picard's hand.

"There! take this, and return to Paris. I shall watch you along the road, to see that you are not loitering to watch me. Be off!"

"But the honour of a *garde bourgeois*—" commenced Maître Picard, somewhat vaguely.

"Ha!" shouted Philippe, raising the halberd as though to strike. Maître Picard made no other attempt to remonstrate. He turned away, and was directly progressing towards Paris as fast as his little legs and rotund body would allow him.

As soon as Philippe saw he was beyond eye-shot, he gathered up the arms, and then returned to Marie.

"We have a fresh and powerful horse, madame," he said; "some good arms, and a clear way, at present. We will abandon this tumbrel, and use our new prize."

The marchioness acceded to every thing;—in fact, since they had started she had appeared completely passive, trusting entirely to the student. Philippe took the small bundle from the cart, and slung it to the holster. He then placed Marie upon the croup of the horse, having turned back part of the sheepskin trappings to form a seat, and got up before her. The whole affair from Maître Picard's first coming up did not occupy four minutes.

"Now, grasp me tightly," he said. "Are you ready? then *en route!*"

He struck the horse as he spoke, and the animal sprang forward, apparently insensible of the double load he was carrying. Philippe's object was at all hazard to press on

as far as was possible towards Compiègne, knowing that at Offemont carriages and horses, with every thing the marchioness needed for her flight, were at her disposal; but the high road between Paris and Senlis was one long straight line, with few bye-ways branching off from it, but those which went completely out of the way; and even along these the journey would have been hazardous, as the snow lay over the open country in one unbroken sheet, alike covering up the ground and the dykes to the same level.

Desgrais and his party had evidently pushed on with speed; for although Philippe was now riding at the rate of ten miles an hour, they saw no signs of them ahead. The church-clock of Le Bourget * struck two as they entered the village; the snow had ceased to fall, and the stars shone somewhat more brightly; but beyond this every thing was wrapped in obscurity, except at the end of the village, where a faint light was gleaming from one of the houses. The place consisted of one long street, and it was necessary to pass along this. Philippe reined up the horse, and proceeded, at a slow noiseless walk, in the direction of the light.

"The snow comes aptly enough," he said; "or the ring of this beast's shoes upon the clear frozen ground would soon have betrayed us. We must use a little caution now. I expect they have halted at the post-house."

"What do you mean to do?" said Marie: there will be danger in passing them."

"It must be tried, however. If they arrive before us at Senlis the game is up. You have courage to make the attempt, madame?"

"I will dare any thing," replied the marchioness; "so that my bodily energy will but keep up to my determinations."

"Then we will try it," said Philippe. "Now, keep a tight hold, a sure seat, and a good heart; and leave the rest to me."

* At this little village of Le Bourget, on the 20th of June, 1815, Napoleon, returning from Waterloo, stopped for two hours, that he might not enter Paris until nightfall, and thus diminish in some measure the sensation which his flight from Belgium would produce.

He continued walking the horse along the street until he was close upon the post-house—a wretched cabaret enough,—about which the troop had collected, having dismounted, and knocked up the master for refreshment, and what tidings they could collect. Knowing that, in all probability, the horse they rode would be called upon to exert all his power, Philippe paused for a few minutes to allow the animal to draw his breath; and then creeping in the obscurity as near the *Poste* as he could safely, he struck the sharp and heavy stirrups into the sides of the horse, in lieu of spurs, and dashed hurriedly by.

The alarm was instantaneous. One of the guard perceived them, and called the others from the interior of the *auberge*. Headed by Desgrais, they rushed out and prepared to mount. The arrangements of their trappings took a minute or two, and then they started after the fugitives.

Meantime the horse which bore the student and the marchioness flew on like the wind, with almost quivering rapidity. Philippe knew, however, that this velocity could not be sustained for any very long time, more especially under the extra burden; and he therefore again taxed his invention to produce some fresh scheme by which to deceive the others. He was aware that, somewhat further on, the road divided into two routes, one running through Mortefontaine, and the other by La Chapelle, and this decided him what plan to adopt. Still keeping his horse at his full speed, which the party of Desgrais had not yet been able to come up with, he pressed onward, and in another quarter of an hour had arrived at the bifurcation of the route in question. Taking the right-hand road without allowing his horse to relax his speed, before long they entered the beginning of the street of Mortefontaine.

Philippe pulled up the horse for a few seconds, finding that Desgrais's party were not yet upon them; and then briefly explained to Marie his intentions. It chanced that an old professor of medicine at the Hôtel Dieu,—one Docteur Chapelet, who had in no small degree annoyed Philippe by his exercise of authority over the students generally during his pupilage, had come to settle as apo-

thecary at Mortefontaine. Young Glazer knew the house, which was situated within a court and *porte cochère* in the middle of the village; and towards this he now rode, choosing those parts of the uneven road where the snow was deepest, to leave the most vivid marks behind him. Coming close to the *porte cochère*, he immediately backed the horse into a small watercourse running at the side of the road, and then followed its direction until he came to a part of the road where the wind had blown the snow, as it fell, into the hollows. By this means not a trace of his progress was visible, after the gateway; and crossing the road at this point, he once more put the horse into a gallop across the bare open country, until he regained the *grande route* which led direct to Senlis.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE STRATAGEM AT MORTEFONTAINE. — SENLIS. — THE ACCIDENT.

THE alarm which had been so hurriedly given by the sentinel as the marchioness passed the post-house at Le Bourget, called the guard together immediately; and after the short delay alluded to, they replenished their lights, and pricked on at a smart pace along the high road, leaving directions with the *aubergiste* to inform Maître Picard of their route, should he come up. Arriving at the fork, they halted awhile until they saw the traces of their objects, which they at once followed; for the surface of the snow on the left-hand road was perfectly undisturbed; and these marks, keenly picked out by the quick eye of Desgrais, brought the whole party up to the *porte cochère* of the Docteur Chapelet but a very short time after Marie and Philippe had quitted it. Here the impressions of the horse's shoes suddenly ceased, and here of course they decided that the fugitives had taken shelter.

The Exempt rode up to the bell-handle, and gave a

mighty pull, sufficient to have alarmed the whole village, had it not been so profoundly wrapped in sleep. As it was it awoke the doctor immediately, for his ears were ever sensitive to the slightest tingle of a summons; and he forthwith struck a light, and projected his head, enveloped in a marvellous mass of wrappings, on account of the cold, from the window of the room which overlooked the road at the end of one of the wings.

"*Dieu de Dieux!*" exclaimed the doctor, as he saw the cavalcade below his window. "What is the matter? Who is hurt? Who are you?"

"Admit me directly," said Desgrais, without deigning to answer the doctor's questions; and in such a tone of authority that the professor, imagining nothing less than that he had been sent for by Louis Quatorze himself, or at the least Madame de Montespan, hurried on his clothes, and tumbled down stairs into the court-yard, to which the Exempt and his force were soon admitted.

"*Eh bien*, monsieur!" said Desgrais; "you will now have the kindness to give up the Marchioness of Brinvilliers and an accomplice, whom you have sheltered in your house."

The professor regarded the Exempt with an air of man who is asked a question before he is thoroughly awake.

"Every instant of delay compromises your own security," continued Desgrais. "Where are they?"

"On my word of honour as a member of my learned profession, I know not what you mean, monsieur," at length gasped out the doctor. "There is no one within but Madame Chapelet and the servant."

"Sir," cried Desgrais in a voice of thunder, "if you do not immediately produce the fugitives, we will give you the question of the cord from the top of your own gateway."

"Will anybody tell me what I am expected to do?" cried the professor in an agony of bewilderment. "Sir, captain, —"

"I am no captain, monsieur," interrupted Desgrais; "but an exempt of the Marechaussée. We have traced the fugitives to your door; and now demand them of you. —

Gentlemen," he continued to the guard, "dismount, and proceed to tie up the doctor, and search his house."

"I tell you there is no one here," screamed the unfortunate professor as some of the guard proceeded to lay hands on him; or if there is, it is without my knowledge. You can search my house from top to bottom. I will conduct you every where."

This was said with such frantic anxiety that Desgrais placed the confusion of the doctor rather to the score of undisguised fright than unbelieved truth. He directly stationed sentinels round the house, and, accompanied by Chapelet, and the rest of his men, commenced a searching investigation, scaring the servant — a rosy, drowsy Normande — from her tranquillity; and even breaking the slumbers of Madame Chapelet, whose appearance, in her provincial night-gear, attracted less the attention of the Guet Royal. Not a corner of the abode was left unvisited. Desgrais sounded the panels, and even broke in the side of one of the fire-places, which he thought was a masked recess. He crept up into the lofts, and down into the cellars, but, of course, without success: until, having visited the stable, and found but one horse therein, — a sorry animal, whose appearance betrayed not the least token of recent exercise, — he confessed himself fairly at a loss to know what to do next.

"She is a deep one, that marchioness!" he said, "and has fairly tricked us. We are sorry, monsieur," he added, addressing the professor, "to have annoyed you in such an untimely manner; but you have our best wishes that the remainder of your night's rest will be undisturbed."

The professor made a grimace, and an attempt at a bow.

Desgrais continued: —

"Gentlemen, — we must be again on our way. One thing is certain, — the fugitives will not return to Paris, but, without doubt, are still on the road, although this *ruse* — for such it is — is inexplicable. We must go on to Senlis."

The guard did not obey this order with their usual alacrity. They were put out of heart by the escape of their intended prisoners when they thought them in their

grasp. Their horses, too, were fatigued; and between Mortefontaine and Senlis there were still eight or nine good miles of ground to be got over. But Desgrais's orders were peremptory; and, although grumbling quietly to one another, they remounted, and were again on their pursuit.

But the delay thus brought about had answered Philippe's purpose, who still kept bravely on with his companion, until at last they came to the faubourgs of Senlis, and the horse's hoofs clattered over the pavement of the narrow streets, with the topography of which the student was very well acquainted. The pace had, however, materially diminished; and Philippe was not sorry when they at last stopped at the *poste* — the *Hôtel du Grand-Cerf*. Luckily the inn was open, and the people were up; for a public conveyance running from Valenciennes to Paris was expected within an hour, either sooner or later,—its arrival being a matter of great uncertainty, depending alike on the roads, the weather, and the thieves.

Philippe was on the ground the instant they reached the door; and, assisting Marie to dismount, supported her into the inn, whilst one of the *écuyers* took the horse. As the student reached the *salle-à-manger*, where a bright fire was burning, Marie could bear up no longer. She strove to utter a few words, and then, her voice failing, went into a violent fit of hysterics, that appeared tearing her to pieces.

Philippe was a clever fellow in his profession, and could have prescribed fitly for a patient; but he scarcely knew how to act upon the present occasion. His natural readiness, however, never deserted him; so he sent for the mistress of the hôtel, and, commencing by ordering a chaise and four to be immediately in waiting, that he might command more attention, said to the hostess,

"We must make a *confidante* of you, madame. As a woman, you will assist us. In a word, I am in love with this lady, and we have eloped together to avoid a forced marriage on her part. Will you attend to her kindly, whilst I hurry the stable-people?"

And without waiting for a reply Philippe left the convulsed form of the marchioness to the care of the landlady,

whilst he went into the inn-yard to urge on the putting-to of the horses. The hostess did not disbelieve his story. We have before spoken of the singularly youthful appearance of Marie's features; and, as Philippe Glazer was a handsome young man, about the same age, she took it all for granted, and directly entered into the trouble of "the poor young couple," as she imagined them to be. The prospect of good payment might, at the same time, have increased her sympathy.

When the carriage was ready Philippe returned, and then Marie was slightly recovered, and was sipping some warm wine, poured from one of a number of bright little pewter vessels which were ranged amongst the glowing embers of the fire-place. She was, however, pale and anxious, and earnestly inquired of Philippe if he was ready to start.

"The horses are waiting," he replied, as Marie, turning to the landlady, inquired, "How many others have you in the stable at present?"

"There are six," replied the hostess; "four of which are going on with the Valenciennes express."

"Are the roads safe?" asked the Marchioness.

"But tolerably so, ma'amselle. They usually travel armed who go by night, or with an escort."

"I will have two of your people," she added, "to ride by our side. Let them mount immediately."

"There is little to apprehend from the robbers," said Philippe, as the landlady hurried out of the room.

"But a great deal from Desgrais, if he gets fresh horses," replied Marie. "I would take them all on if I could."

Philippe immediately saw her object. The mistress returned in two minutes, and informed them that all was ready; when, hurriedly paying the account, they entered the lumbering but comfortable vehicle that stood at the door, guarded by two rough-looking *écuyers*, who, in some old postilion's trappings, had been suddenly raised to the dignity of an escort.

"And now to Offemont, by Compiègne," cried Phi-

lippe to the riders. "A treble *pour boire* if you get there under three hours, and without a change! Allons!"

"*Allume! hi donc! hue! hue! ir-r-r-r!*" The traces, long enough for eight horses, tightened; the postilions shouted and cracked their whips; the animals left off whinnying and fighting, and then started swiftly off; their feet clattering and the bridle-bells jingling through the empty streets of Senlis. They did not, however, put out their full speed until they left the town; but then, urged on by Philippe every minute, they dashed on like lightning. But a short way fron the gates they met the Valenciennes express, with the lamp over the driver's head gleaming upon the white road along which they were toiling; and after this the way was clear. On, on they went, as the bare and spectral trees that bordered the route appeared to be flying past them; their very speed counteracting, by its excitement, the depression and fear caused by the journey. Villeneuve-sur-Verberie! they had passed over three leagues. There was a short halt at the *poste* to change the riders of the horses, and thus divide the work, and they were again on the road, which now passed through forests, and along straight avenues of trees with snow-laden branches overhanging the way. Then came more villages, in which no signs of life were visible; again they were hurrying over the open country, or traversing the wood. But still the same rattling pace was kept up, until they again stopped, for as long a rest and as good a bait as the impatience of Marie and Philippe would allow, at La Croix-Saint-Ouen; at the post-house of which village they left their escort, fully satisfied that their horses could be of no further service to any one, for that night at least.

Desgrais had lost too much time at Mortefontaine to get to the inn at Senlis until half an hour after the Marchioness had left. It did not take him long, however, when he got there, to undeceive the landlady as to the real position of affairs. Here fresh annoyances awaited him. The horses, as we have seen, had all been bespoken; those of his own troop were too tired to proceed, and the Exempt therefore determined to use those waiting for the Valen-

ciennes express, which arrived a minute or two after he reached the *Grand Cerf*. This of course led to a violent uproar between the passengers and the guards; but the former could not well help themselves. Desgrais asserted his royal authority for so doing, against which there was no appeal; and the travellers accordingly were obliged to remain at the hotel, whilst the Exempt, and three picked followers, took the horses, and were again on their journey, leaving the scared hostess to recount to her customers, against their will, the deception which had been practised on her.

Nothing befel the party as they rode on to Villeneuve-sur-Verberie, where a relay of fresh horses was obtained at the post, with fresh intelligence of their intended prisoner. At La Croix-Saint-Ouen they fell in with the two stable fellows left behind by Philippe, and from them Desgrais learned that it was the intention of the fugitives to go to Offemont. Knowing that the establishment of the Marchioness at this place was large, and that several horses were at her disposal, the active Exempt foresaw there was yet necessity for the utmost speed; but his companions were completely knocked up; they had ridden in heavy accoutrements from Paris; and although they did not dare to refuse, Desgrais perceived the pursuit would be a sorry business; he therefore determined to go on alone, and mounting a fresh horse, slung a flask of brandy over his shoulders, and started by himself for Compiègne. He was a man of unflinching purpose and iron nerve, and he resolved not to return to Paris until Marie was in his power.

It was between five and six in the morning when he entered a little village adjoining Compiègne, and still dark; but the Exempt found the hamlet in some commotion: lights were flitting about the street, and people talking simultaneously, at the top of their voices, in the manner of their countrymen at the present day, as they gathered round some object in the middle of the road. Desgrais pushed forward, and asked the cause of the tumult at such an unwonted hour.

"The wheels of a post-carriage have taken fire, monsieur," replied a bystander, "and one is quite destroyed."

"And the travellers?" eagerly demanded the Exempt.

"Have gone on to Compiègne in a market-cart, not ten minutes ago."

Desgrais put spurs to his horse, and galloped off without saying another word.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PHILIPPE GLAZER THROWS DESGRAIS OFF THE SCENT.

With all his energy to overtake the fugitives, the Exempt was again too late, although fate appeared almost to have thrown them into his hands. There were a train of market carts coming into Compiègne on all sides from the suburbs; and Desgrais, after stopping one or two, in authoritative tones, to the temporary astonishment of the owners, became so confused with their numbers by the time he reached the Place, where they were all collecting, that he gave up any farther search, and resolved, after a little rest, to proceed to Offemont; for, as may be imagined, after his harassing journey, he was well nigh exhausted. The brandy he carried with him gave him a temporary power of endurance, and he now stood in need of more substantial nourishment; and feeling sure that the Marchioness would go at once to her château, not giving him credit for pursuing her so closely, he still reckoned upon seizing her before noon, and then, with the assistance of the municipal authorities of the town, taking her back to Paris.

In the meantime the humble conveyance which had taken up Marie and Philippe stopped with them at one of the principal inns, at the very time that the active agent of the Marechaussée was endeavouring to discover them in the streets. At Compiègne the Marchioness was well known. The firing of the wheels of the post-carriage accounted sufficiently for their arrival in the market-cart; and her worn, jaded appearance, was attributed to fright at

the occurrence. Her character stood well, no less at Compiègne and the neighbourhood than at Paris, as an amiable and much-wronged lady; the wild career her husband had followed since their separation,—the embarassment of her affairs,—his unbridled licentiousness,—all offered sufficient excuses for her attachment to Sainte-Croix: more especially in an age when gallantry was almost a virtue—at all events, a most venial transgression; and therefore it is not to be wondered at that the entire household of the hotel were anxious to do all they could to assist her at present, even to the point of becoming officious. A fresh carriage and horses to Offemont was all, however, that the Marchioness required, and these were immediately got ready.

"And now, Philippe," said Marie, as they awaited the time to start in one of the rooms of the hotel, "I shall no longer require your help. You had better return to Paris as soon as you well may, and leave the rest of my destiny in my own hands. Here I am comparatively at home, and all are ready to assist me."

"I would see you as far as your house at Offemont," said the student.

"There is no necessity for your so doing," returned Marie. "On the contrary, it may involve you in some little trouble, more especially if I am overtaken before I am able to clear myself to the satisfaction of every body."

"But it is only now a few miles to the château," said Philippe.

"And therefore is there the less occasion for you to accompany me, whichever way the venture turns. If I get there unobserved, your presence would be entirely superfluous; if I am overtaken, it would but involve another in this persecution. I have already been the cause of too much misery."

The deep-drawn, almost wailing, sigh of utter exhaustion and misery which followed these words carried with it such an expression of desolation, that many who had far less faith in her sincerity than Philippe would have been affected by it. And yet the depth and calculation of this extraordinary woman prompted every thing. She knew that if Philippe Glazer was found with her, a fresh link

would be added to the chain of circumstances that connected her with Sainte-Croix's affairs, and the revelations of the casket; and she was anxious that this should be annulled. Hitherto she had owed every thing to his escort and invention; but, now that she was amongst her own people, and enabled to go on by herself, she foresaw that, in the event of their being overtaken, his presence would be considered any thing but favourable to her position. And yet, through all this, she was not at the moment entirely devoid of feeling. We have said that the most schooled and lying natures have their gleams of candour and sincerity, and in an access of this kind she continued to the student,

"You have been very kind to me, Philippe: risking every thing to save me, when, I doubt not, before long the whole world will have turned its back upon me. How can I return this devotion?"

"No more, Madame, I beseech you," replied her companion. "It would be a crime indeed not to have assisted you in this extremity, knowing all as I do."

"All!" half exclaimed the Marchioness, as she bent her eye upon Philippe's countenance; but nothing there indicated a meaning of any import. She continued,

"Let this cloud but blow over, and you shall not complain of my want of gratitude. But at present, take this clasp, and keep it as a *souvenir* of our journey. And promise me," she went on, as she unclasped a jewel from her dress, and placed it in Philippe's hand,— "and promise me that, come what may, you will see me again, under whatever circumstances it may be practicable to do so."

"I swear it," replied Philippe, as he put the gift in his pocket, "even if you were watching my journey to the scaffold!"

Again Marie regarded the student with an intensity, as though she would have probed his most hidden thoughts. It was not the first time that he had alluded to the Place de Grêve upon their journey. Still there was an absence of any apparent intention in the speech; but the words caused a shiver to run through her frame, and she turned

even paler than before, a slight quivering of her lip, in addition, betraying her emotion. At this moment the carriage which was to bear her to Offemont was announced; and pressing Philippe's hand warmly, she averted her face, and without another word hurriedly entered the vehicle. The word was then given to start, the windows were drawn up to shut out the freezing morning air, and in another minute she was on the road to Offemont.

Philippe watched the carriage until it turned the street, and then returned to the *salle-à-manger* of the hotel. The intense excitement, and the hazards he had undergone, now left a reaction of extreme depression. The beauty of Marie de Brinvilliers, and her singular fascinations — her rank and acknowledged acquirements — no less than the romance which her very gallantries had given to her character, had half turned the student's head; and he began to question himself, as he had done a dozen times before during the night, when he felt her clinging to him on the horse, whether his chivalry was not turning into love: and lighting his pipe, he sat over the hearth ruminating upon her present situation, and the events of the last few hours, and what a great thing it was for a student to be in love with a Marchioness; and, lastly, he determined, in the event of her being taken, literally to go through fire and water to assist her, if such were requisite. And then he remembered that when Camille Theira had left Paris for Liége, he had spoken of some letters he had received from the Marchioness, which brought about a new train of thought, until his ideas became altogether confused, and he fell into a doze at the warm fireside.

He was aroused by the entrance of an individual in the costume of the Guet Royal, who marched clanking into the room with an important air shouting loudly for the hostess. But the landlady was engaged at that minute; and, having restlessly walked up to the window and curled his mustachios, he returned to the fireplace, and gave a loud, gruff "hem!" which startled Philippe from his reverie.

"Have you been here long, *mon brave?*" he asked with a patronizing air, having attracted his attention.

"About half an hour," said Philippe. "I came in early to the market."

"Then perhaps you can tell me whether any travellers have arrived or departed within that period.

Philippe's first impulse was to answer in the negative; but a sudden idea struck him that he might turn the reply to good account.

"A lady left here in a carriage about ten minutes ago," he said.

"*Peste!*" exclaimed the guard. "M. Desgrais, the Exempt of the Marechaussée, has just arrived at the prefecture, with an order to arrest a Parisian lady, whom he has followed since last evening, and this must be her. He has sent messengers to every hotel in the town to stop her. Do you know which road she took?"

"The end of her journey was Beauvais," said Philippe, throwing the guard completely off the scent; "the horses were to go to Bois de Lihus."

"That is sufficient," said the other. "I am obliged to you."

And, having apparently got all the information he wanted, he returned to the prefecture, without seeing the landlady, who came to obey his summons within two minutes after he had left.

"So," thought Philippe, "they are got rid of for three leagues and a half at least. The seven, there and back, will give Madame plenty of time to steal a march upon them, which they will not readily make up. And now I had better look to myself."

There was nothing to settle at the inn, so Philippe lounged idly out of the *salle à manger* into the street, where the full bustle and activity of the day's business was beginning to get into play. On arriving at the Place, he found many of the market-carts about to return into the country. Several were going back towards Senlis; but not caring to travel the same route by which he had arrived at Compiègne, for many obvious reasons, he made a bargain with the owner of one of them to carry him to Joulzy, from whence he could easily get to Soissons, and return to Paris by an entirely different route.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OFFEMONT TO LIÈGE. — AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE. — THE SANCTUARY.

WITHIN an hour of leaving the *poste* at Compiègne the Marchioness had traversed a portion of the Foret de l'Aigue, and arrived at Offemont, at her château. Here no longer any difficulty existed in procuring the means of proceeding onward. The horses in the stable were fresh, and prepared for hard work; the servants were attached to her, from her having resided so much with them, up to the death of M. D'Aubray; and a change of dress, from her hurried costume to more suitable habiliments for the journey, somewhat refreshed her.

Still she was aware no time was to be lost; and, knowing well — better than even Desgrais himself — the imminent peril she would be in if taken, she directly ordered her own carriage to be got ready, her determination being to reach the frontier of the Netherlands at the nearest point. Her anxiety created some little astonishment amongst the people: but they had only to obey, and a very little time elapsed before the carriage was in the court, and all prepared for the fresh start.

It was a fine winter's morning. The sun was sparkling on the frozen snow, and the nostrils of the horses steamed in the sharp bracing air, which called a flush on Marie's cheek, and rendered her appearance less haggard, by the temporary glow, than the terrible adventures of the night had made it. And, now that she was entirely dependent upon her own energy for safety, her firmness rose with the danger. The first shock passed, all her wondrous determination came back to her assistance. In her utter, fearful heartlessness, she was almost beginning to look already upon the death of Gaudin as an accident by which some clog had been removed, and she had been left free and unfettered to follow her own will, as soon as her safety from her pursuers was secured.

A large package, apparently of clothes, was put in the carriage with her, and then the word was given to proceed at once to Laon, — a large town, some four-and-twenty miles off,— with such speed as the horses could make in the snow. Here she arrived towards the afternoon, and then with fresh horses went on towards Vervins, changing at the little village of Marle, and taking some slight refreshment. It will be unnecessary for us to follow the Marchioness with minuteness throughout her route; for nothing beyond the ordinary adventures of the road occurred until she reached the frontier. Paying well at every post, the horses were urged, in spite of all disadvantages, far beyond the common rate of travelling, and her hopes increased with every hour that Desgrais had been put off the scent. Reaching Vervins in the night, she went on to Rocroi, through Maubert, arriving at the former place some twenty hours after her departure from Offemont. Here she rested some little time, having need of refreshment beyond the few things she had, with some forethought, brought with her. At Fumay another delay was occasioned by the lack of horses; but this temporary hindrance was less annoying; for, since the previous evening, the frost had set in with such unparalleled severity, that, with every contrivance, the cold had become intense, even causing her to suffer acute pain. But at night she was enabled again to be on the road, and reached Givet, the frontier town on the French side of the river Meuse, early in the evening.

Although not above five o'clock, the streets of this picturesque place were almost deserted, in consequence of the cold; and the people at the inn were astonished to see a solitary female alight from the carriage, which now bore evidences of having come a long journey. But they carried the few effects that Marie had with her into the common room of the inn, and then heaped up the fire, and bustled about to serve her, impressed with some respect by the liberality with which she paid the posts, and the report carried on from one town to another, that such had been the case throughout the journey. Here all danger she imagined was over. The Meuse only separated her

from another country, and to cross this was the work of half a minute. Hence she determined upon remaining at Givet for the night; for, with all her energy, her animal powers were now well nigh exhausted by reason of want of rest.

She was alone in the large and cheerless public room of the *L'Ane Doré*, — the hotel to which the postilions had brought her, — whilst the servants got another chamber warmed and ready to receive her. The hurry and confusion of the last two days and nights had left her but little time for reflection; but, now that the great risk was comparatively lessened, reaction took place, and a bitter depression stole over her feelings — crushing and desolate. All the terrible circumstances which had so lately occurred came back to her mind with fearful distinctness; the very shadows that danced upon the walls and ceiling appeared endowed with ghastly forms, that flickered and gibbered about her with an air of triumph. She could not close her eyes, and shut them out; for the mere notion that they were then still mocking her was more insupportable than absolutely fixing her open eyes upon them. Anon the warmth of the fire, coming after the biting cold of the open air, induced drowsiness; and in a half-sleeping, half-waking state, these fitful shadows changed from the indistinct shapes into which her imagination had transformed them to palpable and horrid objects. A crowd of pale and sheeted spectres, with wasted limbs and distorted faces, as though they had died after long-protracted agony, swept slowly before her, bearing the semblances of those who, by her hellish agency, had filled the Salle des Cadavares of the Hôtel Dieu. Her father, too, was there, — vivid and life-like, as he had seemed to her on that fatal evening at Offemont, when the first step of her diabolical career had been taken. Her brothers rose up as well, and denounced her as they moved their blackened lips; and, lastly, she saw the form of Gaudin de Sainte-Croix advancing through the immaterial and hideous groups that surrounded him. He came towards her, and, although the stamp of death was on his features, she felt his breath hot and stifling on her cheek as he advanced. She tried to move away, but

some hideous sensation riveted her to the spot. He came still nearer, and stretched forth his hand to seize her, when with a cry of terror she awoke, and found herself still alone in the chamber; whilst a violent ringing of the bell in the court-yard recalled her at once to her senses.

She directly rushed to the window, her imagination picturing nothing less than the arrival of Desgrais. But to her relief she saw nothing beyond a small country vehicle, drawn by one horse, from which a man, apparently young, leapt down, and directed the fellow in attendance to take charge of it. He then entered the court; and immediately afterwards Marie heard him coming towards the room in which she was. She had barely time to throw a scarf over her head, and draw it together, so as in a measure to conceal her features, when the new comer entered.

He started back for a moment as he perceived the room was occupied; and then, with some common-place salutation, to which Marie only replied with a bow, advanced towards the fire-place. The marchioness perceived that he was scrutinizing her with sidelong glances, and again became somewhat alarmed; when the stranger divested himself of a travelling-cloak, and threw it on the table, previously to kicking the embers on the hearth carelessly together with his foot. As he did this the fire burnt up, and Marie caught a glimpse of his face. A subdued cry of surprise burst from her lips as she thought she recognized him; and she then exclaimed, half interrogating, half addressing him, —

"Camille Theria!"

"The same," returned Theria, — for it was he. "The same; and at your service, madame, mademoiselle, or *ma belle*, — whichever title you choose to appropriate to yourself."

"Have you forgotten me?" she asked, as she threw back the scarf, and showed her face.

"Marie!" exclaimed Camille, as he started at the revelation. And he added, almost directly, but in an altered tone, as though he would have been better pleased had his

companion been any one else: "*Mon Dieu!* how came you here, for us to meet thus?"

"You are annoyed, then, at meeting me," replied Marie; for her keen perception detected the difference of his expression. And, as she assumed a tearful and appealing look, she added, "I am used to this, Camille; and ought to have expected it. The time was when I should have been too proud to have even replied to you; but persecution and misery have crushed my spirit. My heart is quite—quite broken."

She bowed down her head, and covered her face with her hands. She meant Camille to believe that she was weeping. He did so, and was touched at her distress. Taking one of her hands in his own, he said in kinder accents,—

"I was surprised at this sudden rencontre, Marie. I know not why, but I did not expect that we should ever meet again. It certainly was not my wish, although you will not give me credit for the cause."

"And what is that?"

"I will tell you. You know I left Paris for Liége, my native place, some time ago. I have since then followed my profession there; and am about to be married. My intended lives at Mezières, whence I am now returning from a visit."

"And you ought to forget me," replied Marie; "it is right to do so." Then she added, "Do you remember the last evening we met, Camille?"

"It would be difficult to forget it. I have the scar here on my arm from Monsieur de Sainte-Croix's sword. Where is he — at Paris still?"

"I know not," answered the Marchioness, with a violent effort to conceal her emotion; "it is long since we have met."

"He may be alive or dead, for aught I could say to the contrary," said Theria. "I never hear from Paris now."

"He knows nothing, then," thought the Marchioness.

"But how is it I find you here?" continued Theria; "so far from home, and alone?"

"Alas! Camille, it is a sad story, and some day you

shall know everything. I have been compelled to fly from Paris — from my creditors — to avoid a prison. The separation from my husband and children drove me to seek any excitement that would drown my wretchedness. I played deeply, and I am ruined."

"Are you pursued?"

"I believe the authorities are close upon my track. I only left Paris the evening before last. Your old friend, Philippe Glazer came with me to Offemont, and from that place I have travelled alone."

"I think you might have chosen a better resting-place," said Theria. "This is the principal hotel, and the first to which the police would come. I shall wait here until my horse is rested, and then push on to-night, if possible, to Dinant; for I must be at Liége to-morrow. Will you accompany me?"

"Again upon the road!" murmured his companion, in accents of despair. "My strength has nearly deserted me!"

"It will be safer for you, if things are as you state," replied Camille. "You will have passed the frontier, and be three leagues nearer the termination of your journey. We will sup together, if you please, Marie, and talk it over: I shall not start for an hour yet. Mass! how the wind is shrieking along the market-place!"

"I will go with you," said Marie, after a little deliberation. "I could not bear to be left here now, wretched and utterly deserted as I am. The sight of you has recalled so many old feelings, that——"

"Understand me, Marie," interrupted Camille, "the past must be never again alluded to between us. I have told you my position; and if we meet, it can only be as friends."

"It shall be as you wish, Camille," replied the Marchioness with a sigh. "I will not give you cause for the lightest rebuke."

Some of the people of the inn appeared at that moment, and at Camille's orders laid out a table for supper. When they left the room he said,

"Have you no other dress? In my quiet vehicle your

rich costume would at least excite curiosity; and the more unobserved we are, the safer."

"I have provided against any suspicion," said Marie; and, taking up the bundle she had brought with her, she left the room, returning within five minutes attired as a *paysanne* of the Foret de l'Aigue. Her hair, which she usually wore in showering ringlets about her neck and shoulders, was knotted and disordered by her journey; and she stood before a large mirror in the room, to put it up beneath a small country cap, first letting fall its entire flowing length, with a coquetry that was intended to produce its effect upon Theria. But Camille's affections were fixed at present rather on a brioche that adorned the table, and the effect was lost.

Whilst thus occupied, an unusual stir was heard in the street below the inn. Marie, alive to every sound, again rushed to the window, and, to her dismay, perceived that her worst fears were realised. A mounted escort of guards had surrounded a carriage, in which, by the lights they carried, she could plainly recognise Desgrais, and two other exempts. He had closely followed her, making up for the time lost in the wild-goose chase towards Beauvais by double speed, as soon as he found himself on the right tract: and, as Camille had imagined, came first to the principal hotel.

"I am lost!" she exclaimed, as she retreated from the window. "They have traced me!"

"Not yet," said Camille, jumping up. "But you must be off directly. Where is your passport?"

A cry of terror broke from Marie's lips at the question. She had left home without one, forgetting that it would be demanded at the frontier.

"Never mind," cried Theria: "this way. We can get into the court before they enter by this staircase, and thence to some of the back streets. You must run every risk, if you wish to escape; though I should imagine for a matter of debt they would not be very hard upon you. Come — come!"

Little persuasion was needed to induce Marie to accompany her new guide. They flew down the small flight of

stairs indicated by Theria, and were quickly in the street in the rear of the hotel, whence a few turns conducted them to the river side, where the Meuse was chafing amidst the huge blocks of ice which had floated down its stream, and were gathering into one solid mass.

"If you could but cross the river," he said, "we should be safe. But a boat could not make its way amidst the ice. We will try it, however, if you choose."

"I am ready," said Marie. "The chance is a desperate one, either way."

"We must not be particular about what craft we take," said Theria, "so long as it remains undiscovered. Here is one I think will do."

A small boat had been hauled on to the bank, which Camille directly launched through the brittle ice close to the shore; and then, assisting Marie to enter it, he got in himself, and pushed off with one of the stretchers. So rapidly had everything taken place, that before the Marchioness well understood what they were about, she found herself with Theria half across the river.

It was not very dark. One or two lights were gleaming and struggling with the wind along the edge of the river; and the frosty brightness of the stars was sufficient to enable them to discern surrounding objects. The huge blocks of ice kept floating about them, at times turning their boat completely round; and at last a conglomeration of these masses hemmed them in, threatening entirely to arrest their farther progress. Theria made a few strenuous efforts to set the boat free, but in vain. Another and another block joined the body, until the entire group, wedging itself in with some fixed groups that extended a third of the way across the river, became altogether immoveable.

"*Pheuh!*" said Camille, as, after a few laborious attempts to get the boat out of the mass, he threw down his piece of board, and saw the futility of his work. "What can we do now? We are fairly trapped."

"It is all over!" exclaimed Marie, as she gazed at the gloomy masses, about which the cold feathery spray of the river was dashing, terrible to look at in the obscurity.

"We shall be kept here until daylight, and then be captured."

"If we are, I shall be mistaken," said Theria. "The ice ought to make a bridge, although a slippery one.

He tried to gain a footing upon one or two of the blocks; but they turned round as he touched them. At last he found one larger and firmer than the rest,—a conglomerate of several pieces, forming a perfect iceberg—and this was frozen to some others that had been arrested in their progress by one or two piles just under water. It was extremely hazardous; but their only chance was to endeavour to reach the bank by this treacherous passage. Theria stepped carefully from the boat on to the block, which, somewhat depressed in the middle, offered a safer platform to stand upon than those of a more irregular shape. Then, assured of its stability, he gave his hand to the Marchioness, and bidding her to trust herself entirely to his guidance, assisted her on to the ice, moving with extreme caution, and sideways towards the bank. The least slip of the foot or overbalance of weight would at once have been fatal to both; but, fortunately, the severity of the frost had so bound the masses to each other that in little more than a minute their perilous journey was accomplished, and they stood on the firm land of the other side of the river. The cold had kept all within doors, so that they were not observed by any passers by; and the darkness hid them from the view of the sentinels on the adjacent fortifications.

Camille directly led Marie to a small cabaret on the quay, and told her to await his return, whilst he went back to the hotel by the bridge,—having his passport *en règle*, and being, moreover, slightly known to the authorities. His absence had scarcely been noticed at the *Ane Doré* in the confusion, although they were eagerly seeking the Marchioness; so he ordered out his horse and little conveyance, and drove over the bridge to the spot where he had left Marie. Here she joined him, and they then set off together to Dinant, the first town in Belgium on crossing the frontier, where they arrived in two hours.

Now Marie determined at all hazards to stop. She had meant to do so at Givet, had it been practicable, for her strength would hold out no longer; indeed, for the last ten miles of her journey, she had been in a complete state of stupefaction from want of rest, after the trials she had undergone. Theria went to another house to avoid any suspicion, recommending her to post onward in the morning, so as to reach Liége before Desgrais could get any order for her "extradition" from the Conseil des Soixante in that city. The chances were in favour of her security; for no one had seen her leave Givet, nor would the passport books afford any information as to her route.

Meantime Desgrais had learned sufficient at the *Ane Doré* to convince him that the marchioness had been there; and the discovery of the garments she had left at the hotel at once decided him. But she had again slipped through his hands, and this time without leaving a trace of her journey behind her. He immediately sent his archers round to the commissaries of police and the barriers; but no passport had been seen that night, nor were the guards aware that any one had crossed the bridge since dark, except Theria, whom they mentioned. But he knew that the marchioness had the passage of the frontier for her object, and that Liége, as the nearest place of importance, would, in all probability, be the end of her journey; and, consequently, leaving a portion of his men at Givet, with orders to make the strictest investigation at all the hotels and small inns in the neighbourhood, he went on the same night to Dinant, actually sleeping in that town within two hundred yards of his object.

Marie was up as soon as there was daylight enough to proceed on her journey. Twenty leagues were now all that remained between her and Liége, and these she meant to traverse before night. The rest of some hours had refreshed her, bodily and mentally; and she was once more ready to encounter any difficulties her further progress might bring forth. The Exempt never heard of the departure, (which he immediately knew to be that of the Marchioness, until three or four hours after she had left

Dinant ;) and then, still at a loss to account for the manner in which she had contrived to elude the police authorities at Givet, he ordered out a carriage and horses, and started after her with all the speed his money and authority could command, leaving his archers behind, — with the exception of two who accompanied him, — with orders to follow him as hastily as their means would permit.

Empanne, — Havelange, — Nandrin, — all were passed without any circumstance occurring to obstruct Marie's flight; and the gloom of the winter's night was closing fast about her as the carriage came within the last mile of Liége. It was here, as she looked behind her through the small window at the back of the vehicle, to see if there were any signs of pursuit on the road, — which had been her sole occupation during the day, — that she first perceived two gleaming lights in the distance, evidently following her. She urged on the postilions, and a turn of the road hid them from her view. Then they were again visible, and apparently nearer; directly the brow of a hill, as she descended, once more shut them out; and the next minute she saw them gaining upon her during every interval of perfect darkness. Swiftly as she was flying along the road, it was evident that the other party was more than a match for her *attelage* in speed; and, perceiving from this that every effort was being made to come up with her, she concluded that it was Desgrais.

Lashed and goaded to madness, her horses flew on like the wind, as from the front of the carriage she promised an additional reward every instant to their riders, if they brought her to Liége before the other traveller. But Desgrais — for it was he — was equally on the alert. On the first intimation that a carriage was in sight on the road before them, he had left the interior, and, clinging to the front of the voiture, was urging his own people on as earnestly as the Marchioness, until the uproar of cries and cracking whips were plainly audible to the terrified inmate of the first vehicle. Tearing up hill, until the breathless horses almost fell from being overtasked, — anon racing down, with a precipitancy that threatened annihilation, every instant, — and then flying along the level road, so close together,

that the steam from the animals in the carriage of the Marchioness was still visible in the gleam of the lamps belonging to Desgrais, did the chase continue.

At last they entered Liége, and the pursuit now became doubly exciting from the cries of the postilions, as they traversed the glooming streets at a fearful pace, cracking their whips as they whirled them above their heads, and shouting in an unearthly manner to warn the passengers of their advent. A charette in the road offered a temporary check to Marie's carriage, and Desgrais the next instant was close up to her. But nearer he could not come; for the width of the thoroughfare would not allow the two vehicles to go abreast. They were, however, coming to a broader street, and then Marie knew he would pass her. To avoid this, and gain a minute of time, — for every second now was worth the price of her life, — she collected some straw from the interior of her coach, and tied it into a bundle with her handkerchief; then lighting it at the lamp of the carriage, she leaned out of window, and threw it, blazing, directly in front of the leaders of the other voiture. The horse on which the postilion was riding reared up in fright, and directly threw him; his fellow backed as well, and the wheelers coming over them, they were all thrown together in a terrible confusion before the carriage, which by its own impetus came partly on them. In an instant Desgrais leaped upon his feet, — for the shock had also thrown him upon the ground, — and clearing the rider from the stirrups, he cut the traces with his poniard, and getting the horse upon his legs, vaulted into the saddle, leaving the rest of his equipage to the care of the archers who were inside. The carriage of the Marchioness was not fifty yards ahead as it turned towards the convent she had indicated to the drivers. Once more every thing depended on a few seconds; and Desgrais goaded the poor animal with the point of his weapon to spur it onwards, as the horses of his intended prisoner, equally urged, kept tearing on towards the goal. At last they stopped at the door of the convent; and, as its heavy bell sounded with

a loud and violent peal, the exempt came up to the carriage.

He sprang from his horse, and tore down, rather than opened, the door nearest the road, and seized the Marchioness by her mantle. At that instant the gate of the convent opened, as she jumped from the carriage, and entered the lodge, leaving the garment in the hand of the exempt. Desgrais rushed through the vehicle, and was about to follow her, when she seized a cross from the porch, and held it towards him with a smile of triumph, that threw an expression of demoniac beauty over her features.

"You dare not touch me!" she cried; "or you are lost, body and soul!"

With an oath, Desgrais fell back before the sacred emblem. Marie had thrown herself upon the church, and claimed a sanctuary. An impassable barrier was between them, and the whole of his toil to arrest her had gone for nothing. The chance had been lost, in a pursuit of nearly one hundred leagues, by half a minute.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE END OF LACHAUSSÉE.

Whilst all this turmoil had been going on, Paris was no less a scene of excitement; indeed, it was greater, inasmuch as it affected a larger number of persons. The awful death of Sainte-Croix, and the discoveries which had arisen from the unexpected revelation of the casket, furnished sufficient matter for conversation to all the gossips of the good city. Master Glazer's shop was more than ever besieged by the curious *bourgeoisés*, as he was supposed to be better acquainted than any one else, not

even excepting the commissary of police, with the circumstances of the event. But it was remarked that Philippe preserved a perfect silence respecting the share which the Marchioness of Brinvilliers was known to have had in the transactions of the newly-discovered poisoners. He always avoided the most distant allusion to the catastrophe; and even when Maître Picard wished to push his questions very closely, — half in his capacity of public functionary, half as a private gossip, — the young student generally cut all his queries so very short, that Picard almost imagined he must have been one of the parties implicated.

"For, look you, messieurs," the little *chapelier* would say, when he got out of Philippe's ear-shot, and was traversing the Place Maubert, "Madame de Brinvilliers had as many accomplices as our good King Louis — whom Montespan preserve! — has sweethearts. Else, whence came the powerful armed force which unhorsed me on the road to Le Bourget?"

"She had dealings with the sorcerers," observed a neighbour.

"I believe it," replied M. Picard. "I heard of her with Exili, who is about to suffer at the gibbet of Montfaucon, the night M. de Sainte-Croix died. And the exempt's guards, who returned to Paris, have affirmed that she flew past them on a whirlwind whilst they halted at Le Bourget. She will never be taken — no: the devil would save her from the centre of the *chambre ardente* itself, even if M. La Reynie had the care of her. *Allons! buvons!* it is a wicked world!"

And then the little *bourgeois* and his neighbours turned into the nearest tavern, and, whatever might be the time of day at their entrance, never appeared until after curfew had sounded, when Maître Picard was usually conducted home to the Rue de la Harpe by the Gascon, Jean Blacquart, whose unwillingness to engage in personal encounter was scarcely sufficient to keep the *chapelier* from potvaliantly embroiling himself with everybody unarmed that he chanced to meet. Our business is not, however, so much with these personages just at present; but with those of whom we have not heard for some little time.

Night was closing round the gloomy precincts of the Cimetière des Innocents, — mysterious, cold, cheerless. The snow lay upon the burial-ground, and clung to the decaying wreaths and garlands that rotted on the iron crosses which started up from the earth. The solemn and dreary place was doubly desolate in the wintry trance of nature. In the centre of the cemetery a tall obelisk arose, and on the summit of this, some fifteen feet from the ground, was a large lantern, from which a pale light gleamed over the abodes of the dead, throwing its rays sufficiently far to reveal a ghastly procession of corpses, of all ages and professions, painted on the walls and covered charnels in which the wealthier classes were interred, who chose to carry their exclusiveness into the very grave. This *danse macabre*, or dance of death, was then rapidly becoming invisible at different stages of its march. At various parts of the enclosure small lamps struggled with the wind, as they hung before images of the Virgin placed in niches of the walls and tombs; and lights were visible in the higher windows of the crowded, and not unpicturesque, buildings that enclosed the cemetery; but elsewhere every thing was dark, and the place was untenanted but by the dead.

One figure, however, might have been seen kneeling at a fresh grave for some time, in spite of the inclemency of the weather. And about this the snow had been cleared away; the chaplets on the small cross were fresh, and a few dark evergreens were planted at the head and foot. A scroll in the ironwork bore the inscription, "*Cy giste Gaudin de Sainte-Croix, qui trépassa, la vingt-neuvième année de son âge.*" It was the tomb of the guilty lover of the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, and the solitary mourner was Louise Gauthier.

Of all with whom Sainte-Croix had been on terms of intimacy, not one had cared to make inquiry after him, when the report of his death was first promulgated, but the Languedocian. But Louise, assisted by Benoit (with whom she had returned to live, since the evening at the Hôtel de Cluny, when she again fell in with him), had seen the body taken from the dismal vault below the

Palais des Thermes, to his old abode in the Rue des Bernardins. She had been the solitary mourner when his body was rudely consigned to that part of the ground allotted to those for whom no consecrated rites were offered; and her own hands had afterwards adorned the grave — the only one thus distinguished in this division of the cemetery—with the humble tributes that were about it. All this she had done without one tear, or expression of the wretchedness that was breaking her heart; but when it was accomplished, she gave full vent to her pent-up feelings, and was accustomed to seek the cemetery every evening, weeping and praying in the terrible solitude of the burial-place, over the grave whose narrow limits comprised her world.

It was past the time of curfew; but the city of Paris had not the air of quietude which it usually wore at this period of the night. The murmur of a distant multitude could be heard mingling with the occasional solemn tolling of some hoarse and deep-mouthed bell, and now and then the roll of drums calling troops together. Louise had been some hours in the cemetery, when she was surprised by the appearance of Benoit and his wife, who had come to seek her, alarmed at her unusual stay from home, although they were aware of the locality in which she was most likely to be found. The honest couple had started off together to bring her back; and now assisting her to rise, had persuaded her to return with them.

As they got into the Rue des Lombards, on their way towards the river, a sudden rush of people in great numbers separated them from one another, and they were obliged to fall in with the stream, which, increasing at every corner of a fresh thoroughfare, almost carried them off their legs. Louise addressed a few questions to some that she came in contact with, but no answer was returned; all appeared too anxious to hurry onward. Soon the crowd became more dense in the narrow streets, and the confusion and jostling was increased by the mounted guard who pressed on through the people, almost riding them down, amidst the screams of the women and curses of the men, who only received a few blows in return. She was now entirely borne onward by the multitude, and in the dense

mass of people could scarcely look up to see in what direction she was being impelled, until she found herself close to the Grand Chatelet.

The whole of the Carrefour was lined with troops carrying cressets, so that it was light as day; and in the centre a scaffold was erected, on which one or two figures were standing. One of these was a priest, the others were masked, and held, what appeared in the distance to be long staves, in their hands. Louise's heart sickened as she foresaw that she was about to be present at an execution, and one of the most terrible kind. There was no headsman's block on the platform; but some apparatus could be seen upon the floor, but a few inches in height. A wretch was about to be broken on the wheel.

Suddenly the murmurs of the people ceased: lights moved in slow procession from the Chatelet, and the voices of monks could be heard chaunting a requiem. They advanced between lines of troops towards the scaffold, and then the criminal could be distinctly seen. He was not walking, however, between them, nor was he dragged on a sledge, but borne on a species of bier, raised on the shoulders of some of the soldiery; from which the spectators knew that the question had been undergone, and the rack had left its victim crippled with dislocated limbs. By the men in masks he was lifted on to the platform; and then a yell from the vast multitude assembled broke the silence that had just reigned. It was a terrible cry of ferocity and denunciation.

Louise could scarcely speak; but she asked a female who was close to her the name of the criminal.

"One of the prisoners," replied the woman; "his name is Lachaussée. He will make up for Sainte-Croix's cheating us out of his execution. And the Marchioness of Brinvilliers will follow when she is caught. Oh! these are brave times! I should like to have seen Sainte-Croix broken. They say he was handsome: and that he would have held out to the last. Hist!"

The noise of the multitude ceased as the priest advanced to the edge of the scaffold and addressed them. His words could only be heard by the few around him; but they were

carried from one to the other, and were to the effect that the criminal had refused to confess, after having undergone the question both ordinary and extraordinary; that his own guilt had been sufficiently proved; but that none of his accomplices had been named, except his master and instructor, Monsieur Gaudin de Sainte-Croix, upon whom a just retribution had fallen. The last judgment of the law would now be carried into effect; but the *coup de grace* would be withheld until the criminal had confessed all that he was known to be acquainted with respecting his presumed accomplice, the Marchioness of Brinvilliers, now in sanctuary, as it was supposed, at a convent beyond the frontier.

There was an awful silence. The wretched man was seized by the other figures on the scaffold, and placed upon the wheel; and the next minute the staff in the hands of one of the executioners was raised. It descended with a dull, heavy sound, distinctly audible at every part of the square, as was the sharp cry of agony that burst from the lips of the culprit. The priest stooped down, and appeared to commune with him; but in a few seconds he rose again, and the blow was repeated, followed by the same scream, but less piercing than before. Another and another followed, and then a conversation of greater length took place between the criminal and his confessor. The monk advanced again to the front of the scaffold, and waving his hand, stopped the murmur that was rising from the crowd, as they commented on the proceedings.

"The criminal Lachaussée has confessed," he said. "He acknowledges his guilt, and also that of Madame Marie Magdalaine D'Aubray, Marchioness of Brinvilliers, hitherto suspected, from whom he owns to have received the poisons with which her two brothers were murdered. The *coup de grace* may now be given."

He held up a crucifix in sight of the writhing object of his speech, and directed the chief executioner to despatch his victim. The man again raised the bar, and it descended upon the breast of Lachaussée, crushing all before it. No cry followed the blow this time: the death of the wretched man was instantaneous.

The multitude remained silent for a few seconds, as if they were listening for another cry. But voices were at length heard, first one and then another, gradually spreading, until the murmur broke forth into one savage roar of exultation, when they knew that the criminal had ceased to exist. A clue had been found to the mystery in which the deaths by poison had long been involved; and now that one of the participators in the horrible deeds, that had so long baffled the keenest vigilance of the authorities, had expiated his offence before their eyes, their satisfaction knew no bounds. And, when they had thus vented their approval of the sight they had just witnessed, they turned away from the Carrefour, and began to leave the spot by the different outlets.

Louise, who had been scarcely able to sustain herself through the ghastly scene, was hurried on by the breaking up of the crowd, until she contrived to get within a *porte cochère*, meaning to let them pass. But she had not been there an instant before she was recognised by a man in the throng, who had been a servant of François D'Aubray.

"Ho!" cried the fellow, as he saw her by the light of a cresset, "here is another of them. I saw her with Madame de Brinvilliers, the night that her brothers were murdered. She is an *empoisonneuse*. To prison with the witch!"

He advanced towards the poor girl as he spoke, whilst the crowd stopped in their passage. But, as he approached her, he was seized by a powerful arm, and, having been twisted round, was flung with some violence upon the ground.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE GAME IS UP — THE TRAP. — MARIE RETURNS WITH DESGRAIS TO THE CONCIERGERIE.

Any other officer than Desgrais would have given up further attempts to arrest the Marchioness, now that she was

in the sanctuary of a convent, in a town, too, where any invasion of the privileges belonging to a religious house would have been avenged with the most unrelenting severity. But the exempt felt bitterly the manner in which he had been more than once duped upon the road, at times when his prey was completely within his grasp. He was exceedingly sensitive as regarded his position and reputation as the most vigilant officer of the Marechaussée; and he determined not to enter Paris again till he could do so accompanied by the marchioness.

To effect this, he took a lodging in a retired quarter of Liège, and remained there for a few weeks, dismissing his archers and guards, with orders to return to Givet, and be in readiness to join him at Liège upon the shortest notice. To the marchioness he was personally unknown. She had not met him above once or twice, and then without particularly regarding him; and this decided him as to the course he would pursue. He was young and active; the very business in which he was constantly engaged had given him admission into all ranks of society; and he had tact and ready perception to profit by his observations, and adopt the manners of any particular class which he found it necessary to assume. He arranged his plans; and, when he imagined sufficient time had elapsed, proceeded to put them into execution.

To effect the capture, he disguised himself in the dress of an abbé, and presented himself one evening at the gates of the convent in which Marie had sought shelter, requesting to see her. The porter, after a slight hesitation, admitted him to the parlour, and in a few minutes the object of his venture appeared.

The marchioness had entirely recovered from the fatigues of her journey. Those who had known her intimately would have remarked a few lines on her face, resulting from the agitation caused by recent events; but to others there was still the same girlish, confiding face, —still the same blue lustrous eyes, and smooth expansive forehead, and the rosy lips still half revealed the same beautiful teeth that had so dazzled the sight of the gallants, and raised the envy of the dames of the court at Versailles.

She inclined gracefully to Desgrais as she entered the room; and then in her softest tones inquired "to what chance she was indebted for the honour of a visit from Monsieur l'Abbé?"

"I am a poor servant of the Church, madame," he replied, "and am returning from a pilgrimage to Rome with relics to be deposited at the Jacobins, in the Rue St. Honoré. Being detained at Liège upon matters of ecclesiastical interest, I heard that you were here, and came to offer my respects."

"I have done little to deserve this attention, my holy father," said Marie.

"You have suffered much undeserved misery, madame," answered Desgrais. "You were a supporter of our Church,—a good and charitable lady, as all Paris can vouch; and I should have taken blame unto myself had I not paid this tribute to your goodness."

"Alas! *mon père?*" cried Marie; "would that the world could think of me as well as you do! Of what avail has been my past life? You will find, on your return to Paris, the blackest stories current against me. A woman, once fallen, has no hope; but every one—those who would have cringed to her the lowest when she was in her position being the foremost—will hurry to crush her more utterly, to beat her lower down. I am lost—for ever!"

"Yet you should hope that the consciousness of your own innocence will one day prevail," returned the exempt.

"I have no hope, monsieur. I am alone in this dreary place—alone even in the midst of its inmates, as though I were shut out entirely from the world."

Desgrais paused for an instant. "She has not mentioned her comrades," he said to himself, "and she was certainly accompanied on the road. All accounts agree in this."

"You are mistaken, madame," he continued aloud. "Think. Is there no one on whom you think you might rely?"

"What mean'you?", inquired Marie eagerly.

For a few seconds they continued gazing at one another, each waiting for the other to speak. Desgrais was wait-

ing for some cue, from which his tact might enable him to proceed; and the marchioness was fearful of committing herself by revealing more than the other knew. Two deep and artful natures were pitted against each other.

Desgrais was the first to speak. With an assumed expression of countenance, calculated to impress his companion with the idea that he understood everything then passing in her mind, and in a voice of deep meaning, he said,

"Is there no one, think you, who does not feel an interest in you? You can trust me. What communication have you held with the world since you have been in this retreat?"

"None, father,—on my soul, none."

"And have you expected to hear from no one?" continued Desgrais in the same tone.

"Camille!" exclaimed the marchioness eagerly. And then, as if aware she had been indiscreet, she closed her lips forcibly together, and remained silent.

"Yes—Camille," replied Desgrais, quickly catching at the name. "Did you think he had deserted you?"

And he looked cautiously round the parlour, and then placed his finger on his mouth, as though he was fearful of being overheard.

"I did not know in what quarter of the town he lived," she answered.

"So," thought Desgrais, "he is in Liège, then."

"And, besides," she went on, "circumstances are changed. He cares no more for me."

"Would you see him?" asked Desgrais.

The vanity of the woman triumphed over her caution. Camille Theria, it was evident to Marie, had found his old attachment revive, as they had met again. He had forgotten his *fiancée*, and was anxious again to see her.

"Am I to believe you?" she asked.

"You may believe your eyes," replied the exempt. "He will be at the tavern of the *Trois Rois* at curfew time to-night."

"Why will he not come here?"

"Would it be advisable? You need fear nothing. I will escort you from the convent, and return with you."

"It will compromise your position," said Marie.

"That will be my own affair, madame," replied Desgrais. "The weather is unfavourable enough to drive the passengers from the streets, and the night is dark. No harm can arrive."

"What can he want with me?" said Marie, half speaking to herself, as she appeared undecided how to act.

"You will learn all," said Desgrais, not trusting himself to speak further on a subject of which he was so utterly ignorant. "But time presses, and the bells will soon ring out. Come, madame, come."

Without any other covering than a cloak wrapped about her, and concealing as much as possible her head and face, Marie yielded to the persuasions of Desgrais, and taking his arm, left the convent unobserved in the direction of the tavern he had mentioned. The perfect quietude she had enjoyed since her arrival at the convent had led her to believe that the French police had entirely given up their intentions of arresting her. Sainte-Croix, in her fearful heartlessness, had been already forgotten; and the prospect of a new conquest — a new victim to her treacherous passions—drew her on with irresistible attraction.

They traversed the steep and uneven streets of Liège, until they came to the door of the tavern, from whose windows the red fire-lights were streaming across the thoroughfare. Desgrais muttered a few words of excuse for the apparent humble appearance of the place, and then conducted Marie into the public room.

"One instant," he said. "I will ask if he is here."

He left the room, closing the door behind him, and Marie was a few moments alone in the apartment. With some slight mistrust, she listened for his return, and imagined she heard, for a few seconds the clank of arms. But this subsided immediately, and Desgrais came back again.

"Is he not yet here?" she asked.

"He is not, madame," said Desgrais in an altered tone; "nor is it likely that he will come."

"What do you imply?" exclaimed Marie, somewhat alarmed, and advancing towards the door.

"Pardon me, madame," said Desgrais, "but you cannot pass."

"Insolent!" cried the marchioness. "What does this outrage mean."

"That you are my prisoner, madame,"

"Prisoner! And by whose orders?"

"By order of his Majesty Louis the Fourteenth, King of France," cried Desgrais loudly, as he threw aside his abbé's robes, and appeared in his under-clothing as exempt of the guard.

The words had been the signal to those without, whom he had left the room to put upon their guard. As he pronounced them, they rushed into the room, and the marchioness found herself surrounded by the archers of the royal guard.

In an instant Marie perceived the trap that had been laid for her. A cry of horror broke from her lips, but she almost immediately recovered her self-possession.

"Miscreant!" she cried, as she rushed at Desgrais in her rage. "You have not yet got your prey within your fangs. I am in a country in which your authority goes for naught. You cannot arrest me."

"Once more, you must pardon me, Madame la Marquise," replied Desgrais, as he drew a paper from his belt. "The council of this town has authorised your extradition, upon a letter from the King. You are as much our prisoner as though we had arrested you in your own hotel in Paris."

As quick as lightning, upon comprehending the meaning of the words, Marie drew a poniard from its sheath at the side of one of the guards, and endeavoured to plunge it into her breast. But her hand was arrested by another of the party, and the weapon wrested from her. Baffled in this intention, and in an agony of powerless rage, she endeavoured to speak, but her mouth refused utterance to the words, and with a terrible cry she fell senseless upon the ground.

Confiding her to the care of one of his men, and order-

ing the others to keep guard without, Desgrais now returned to the convent in search of further evidence, furnished with proper authority to bring away whatever he could find. But Marie had little with her. A small case of letters and papers was, however discovered under her pillow, and of this Desgrais immediately took possession. It contained most important evidence against her—no less than a confession of the past actions of her life.

In the meantime Marie gradually recovered; but it was some time before she came completely to herself, from a succession of fainting fits supervening one upon another as the least degree of consciousness returned, and the dreadful reality of her position broke in upon her. The rough soldier with whom she had been left, unused to guard such prisoners, and somewhat struck with her beauty and evidently superior position in life, had been in great confusion of ideas as to what he ought to do, and had at last called one of the females attached to the establishment to the aid of the marchioness. By some of those trifling remedies which women only appear to have at command for their own sex, in the like emergencies, Marie was gradually brought round, and then the female departed, and she was left alone with her guard—pale and trembling, resembling a corpse, but for the still bright eye, and the convulsive quivering of every nerve in her delicate frame. She uttered not a syllable, but remained in a corner of the room, on a rude settle to which she had been carried by the soldiers; and the sentinel's heavy tread as he paced backwards and forwards before the door of the apartment, was the only sound that broke the dreary stillness.

In less than an hour Desgrais returned. He came accompanied by a *voiture de poste*, having, directly after the capture of his prisoner, ordered it to be in waiting, as well as despatched a courier with commands to have every thing in readiness along the road for fresh relays. He now entered the room, and requested Marie to accompany him into the carriage.

"You have played a sorry part, monsieur, in this drama," she said to him, "and you have triumphed: do not think I am stooping to you if I make one request:

could you see how deeply I feel myself to be degraded in asking this favour, you—even you—might pity me and grant it. You have played with the name of a person this evening, and won your stake off it. Will you allow me to write to him?"

"Provided I see the letter, and you can write it in ten minutes," replied Desgrais. "We must reach Dinant to supper, where also you will rest the night."

"Half that time will be sufficient," said Marie. "Give me the means, and for a few minutes leave me to myself." Desgrais produced his tablets, and tearing a few blank leaves from them gave them to the marchioness, as well as a style he carried: then placing the sentinel again before the door, he withdrew.

As soon as he was gone Marie traced a few words upon the paper, and then spoke to the guard.

"What is your name?" she asked in a low, hurried tone.

"Antoine Barba," replied the man gruffly, "archer in his Majesty's service."

And he continued his march. In less than a minute she again addressed him.

"See," she exclaimed, taking a massive jewelled ornament from her hair; "the sale of this will provide you with good cheer for many a long day, and I will give it to you if you will forward this letter for me to its address. There is nothing in this against your orders. See," she continued, adding the address; "'M. Camille Theria, à Liège,' he is an apothecary in the town. Will you do this for me?"

"Give it to me," said the man. "I will find some one when I am relieved who will pay attention to it."

"Take the wages, then, at the same time," added Marie.

"No," replied the archer, as he put the proffered gift on one side. "I do not want payment for this."

In a minute or two Desgrais came back to know if the letter was concluded, as the carriage was ready to start. Marie shrunk from him when he entered as though he had been a serpent — her horror of the exempt was not feigned.

"I cannot write, monsieur," she said. "I am at your service. *Allons.*"

She put away the arm of the officer as he held it forward for her to take, and passed into the passage, which was lined with the archers. As she passed the sentinel who had kept guard over her in the inn, she whispered to him "Remember," and then entered the carriage without another word, throwing herself into a corner and muffling her face in her cloak.

Desgrais was about to follow, when Barbier slipped the note into his hand. He read—

"My dear Theria,—I have been taken by Desgrais, and am on my road to Paris: save me at all hazards.

"MARIE."

"Lose not an instant," cried the exempt, as he entered the carriage. "On—on with your horses as fast as whip and spur can urge them!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

NEWS FOR LOUISE GAUTHIER AND BENOIT.

THE outcry raised against Louise Gauthier as she left the ghastly scene in the Carrefour du Chatelet, had for the moment well nigh deprived her of her senses. She saw the man who had accused her of being an *empoisonneuse* and an accomplice of Madame de Brinvilliers, thrown down by one of the crowd; and fearful that a desperate riot was about to commence, she seized the opportunity which the confusion afforded, and broke through the ring of the infuriated people who had surrounded her, whilst their attention was diverted. But the person who had come to her assistance followed her; and, when a turn in the street gave them an opportunity of escaping from the resistless current of the mob, she discovered that it was a well-look-

ing young man to whom she had been indebted for her safety.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle," exclaimed the student, for such by his dress he appeared to be, raising his cap; "for introducing myself to you thus hurriedly. Is your name Louise Gauthier."

"It is, monsieur," replied the Languedocian timidly.

"And mine is Philippe Glazer," said the other. "Now we know one another. I was sent to look after you by Benoit Mousel, who is at home by this time. They lost you in the Rue des Lombards."

"How can I thank you for your interference?" said Louise.

"Thank our Lady rather, for the lucky chance that brought me to you at such a moment. I despaired of seeing you in such a vast mob, although Benoit has described you pretty closely. But come, we will find our way to the quay."

"You know Benoit Mousel, then," said Louise, as they moved on together.

"Passably well, mademoiselle. I had him under my care for a while, after he had been somewhat unceremoniously pitched out of window at the Hôtel de Cluny, during one of the merry-makings that M. de Lauzun is accustomed to hold there whenever he is not in the Bastille."

Louise Gauthier recollected the evening too well, and shuddered as she recalled to mind its events. She did not speak again, but keeping close to Philippe's side, as if she feared a fresh attack from the people about, kept on her way in silence towards the water-side.

They descended to one of the landing places at the foot of the Pont Notre Dame; and found the boat lying there, into which the student assisted his companion, and then with a few strokes of his powerful arm, reached the boat-mill. There was a light in the chamber; and the instant they touched the lighter, Benoit and his wife appeared with a flambeau, and broke forth into exclamations of joy at the return of Louise.

In two minutes more the party were assembled in the room, to which the reader has been already introduced. Ba-

thilde bustled about, with her usual good-tempered activity, to place the repast on the table; and when all this was settled, she opened the door of the stove, to let its warm light stream out over the room; and they then took their places.

"I need not make a secret of my mission, mademoiselle," said Philippe, when they were seated; "for I presume there is nothing you would wish to conceal from our friends."

"Because if there is, you know, Louise," said Benoit in continuation, "Bathilde and I will ——"

"Pray stop, *mon ami*," interrupted Louise; "what can I wish to keep from you — you, who know every thing, and have been so kind to me. Well, monsieur?" she added, looking anxiously at Philippe.

"You know this writing," observed Philippe, as he handed her a small packet sealed, and bearing an address.

Louise tremblingly took the parcel and looked at the superscription. As she recognised it, she uttered a low cry of astonishment.

"It is indeed *his!*" she exclaimed, as she bowed her head down, and allowed the parcel to drop in her lap. The next minute her tears were falling quickly after one another upon it.

Bathilde took her hand kindly and pressed it, as they watched her grief in silence; which Philippe Glazer was the first to break.

"I found that in Monsieur de Sainte-Croix's *escritoire*," he said; "one of the few things that Desgrais did not seize upon. I told him it was mine, for I saw what they had discovered made mischief enough, and I did not care to have it extended. It was only to-night I discovered by chance that you were with Benoit and his wife."

Tearfully, and with hesitating hands, Louise opened the packet; and produced from its folds a document drawn up evidently in legal style, and a small note, which she handed to Philippe.

"Read it, monsieur," she said; "I cannot. How long it is since I have seen that writing. I used to wait day after day for some message from him, to show that I was

not forgotten — if it had been but one line — until my heart was sick with the vain expectation. And now it has come; and — he is dead."

The student took the note, and hastily ran his eye over it, before he communicated its contents to the little party. Bathilde and Benoit watched his face anxiously, as they saw it brighten whilst he scanned the writings: it evidently contained no bad news. "Joy!" he exclaimed, as he finished it; "joy to all. I think I shall give up medicine, and take to farming."

"Go on, monsieur!" exclaimed Benoit and his wife in a breath. "What is it?"

"The conveyance of a *terrain* on the Orbe, in Languedoc," continued Philippe, reading, "with a plantation of olives and mulberries, to Louise Gauthier, to be held by her in common with whomever may have befriended her in Paris, and of which the necessary papers are in the hands of M. Macé, notary, Rue de Provence, Beziers!"

"I knew it!" said Benoit, as he slapped the table with a vehemence that sent some things jumping off it, after a few seconds of astonishment. "I knew some day fortune would turn. Continue, monsieur."

Philippe Glazer proceeded to read the note:- whilst Louise gazed at him, almost bewildered.

"'When you receive this,'" he went on, "'I shall have expiated every crime. I feel convinced that my death, come when it may, will be violent and sudden: and whatever may have been my faults, I shall have been punished for them. All I had to dispose of, I have left you: in possessing it, do not forget any that have assisted you. It has been kept through every embarrassment to this end; but circumstances prevented my giving it to you in my lifetime. Beware of the Marchioness of Brinvilliers: forgive me for the misery I caused you, which has been repaid one hundred fold; and forget, if possible,

"'GAUDIN DE SAINTE-CROIX.'"

"'To be delivered into the hands of Louise Gauthier, or, failing to find her, of Benoit Mousel, at the mill-boat below the Pont Notre Dame, in trust for her.'"

"There," said Philippe, as he concluded, and put the papers on the table: "my task is accomplished."

"I cannot accept it," said Louise after a short pause.

"Cannot! mademoiselle," said the student: "you must. Better you take it than it fall into M. Macé's hands for want of a claimant; and from him to a stranger, or the king, or any of his favourites."

"It would only be on one condition," continued the Languedocian. "That Benoit and his wife shared it with me."

"*Pardieu!* Louise: the terms are not hard," said Benoit: "and our hard work will lighten the feeling of dependence. *Sacristie!* a chance of seeing Languedoc again, eh, Bathilde!"

"And a farm," said his wife; "and olives, and mulberries — perhaps chesnuts."

"And no more living by my wits," continued Benoit, "which are wearing away from constant use, when the mill is out of work. No more mountebanking nor singing songs, nor being pitched out of windows for so doing, instead of being paid. Oh! you will go, Louise: we will all go."

"And in a *patache*," said Bathilde, "with Jacquot to draw us: six leagues a day at least! What shall be our first stage?"

"There is plenty of time before you to settle that point," said Philippe, smiling at the eager desire of Bathilde to leave Paris. Then turning to Louise, he added, "You can have no scruples, now, mademoiselle, about this bequest, were it only for the sake of these good people. Think that it may not be so much to benefit yourself, as to render them happy. You consent?"

"I do," replied Louise, after pausing a few seconds. "I cannot look for happiness myself — at least on earth — but through me, they may attain it. I care not how soon we quit this heartless terrible city — never to return."

"We will talk of that to-morrow," said Benoit. "I think enough has taken place for this day. *Ventre bleu!* what a whirl my head is in: the river may rock the boat like a cradle, and the mill click all night, before it sends

me to sleep. You two women get to bed; and Monsieur Glazer and myself will make ourselves comfortable here. I would not recommend him to go along the quays so late, for the city is in a troubled state to-night, and the execution has drawn all the gallows-birds abroad."

And as Louise and Bathilde retired, the two others drew to the fire, and lighted mighty pipes, whose capacious bowls indicated a lengthy sitting.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE JOURNEY. — EXAMINATION OF THE MARCHIONESS.

Hurried on by the orders of the exempt, and escorted by a body of archers, who kept at full gallop round the carriage, the postilions spurred and lashed their horses, bringing Desgrais and his prisoner to Dinant sooner even than they expected. But, beyond the advantage of losing as little time as possible upon the road, there was no absolute necessity for this speed. Theria had not received the letter, as we have seen; and if he had, he could have rendered but little assistance to the marchioness. Still Desgrais knew his prisoner; and uncertain as to what trouble she might cause him by her wonderful art and powers of inventing stratagems, he determined not to relax his vigilance until Marie was safe and secure within the walls of the Conciergerie.

No great deal occurred upon the road worthy of chronicling. The marchioness threw herself in the corner of the carriage, and covering her face with her veil, remained so throughout the journey. From the attempt she had made at self-destruction, Desgrais kept his eye upon her; and upon their arrival at Dinant, he ordered all the knives to be removed from the supper-table, leaving her under the guard of Antoine Barbier, the archer who had watched her

at Liège, whilst he went to arrange with a courier to start directly for Rocroy, and inform the magistrates of that place that the marchioness would be there on the morrow; in order that they might interrogate her, unexpectedly, before she had sufficient time to plan her answers.

As soon as Marie saw that she was left with the same man to whom she had given the note intended for Camille Theria, she uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"I thought you were to remain at Liège," she said. "You have come with us, and the letter has not been delivered!"

The man was taken rather suddenly aback by the marchioness's affirmation. He became confused, and turned away without replying.

"You have deceived me!" she continued with violence, "and I am utterly lost. Now I see why you would not take a reward from me. Where is the letter?"

"I have not got it," replied the archer. "I can answer no more questions, or I shall be punished." And he continued his march.

She would, in spite of this, have spoken to him again, but a servant of the inn entered the room bearing a tray, on which was some refreshment. Marie refused it, as the man placed it on the table; but directly afterwards correcting herself, told him to leave it and retire. The archer glanced at the service, to see that there was nothing with which the marchioness could commit suicide, and then dismissed the attendant, as he continued his monotonous patrol before the door. Suddenly Marie seized one of the drinking-glasses, and dashed it upon the ground, breaking it into several pieces. The noise alarmed the sentinel, and as the marchioness sprang forward to seize one of the bits, with the intention of swallowing it, he also rushed from his post and seized it from her.

"Again foiled!" she muttered through her teeth as she retreated back to the table. "Why have you done this?"

"My orders are to watch you closely," said the man; "and at present I have nothing to do but obey the directions of Monsieur Desgrais."

The marchioness again was silent for some time. She pushed the cover laid for supper away from her, and remained gazing intently at the fire. At last she spoke.

"My friend," she said to the archer. "I believe you have done well. The moment of insanity has passed, and I am grateful to you; you shall see that I will not forget you, in consequence."

The man roughly inclined his head, and continued his promenade.

"Does your condition of life please you?" asked Marie.

"Mass!" replied the archer, as he stopped and leant upon his pike. "There might be better, and there might be worse. I like it well enough: there is no choice if I did not."

"You can leave it, if you choose," said the marchioness. "Listen. I have gold enough at Offemont to buy land in Italy that would support you and yours for life. Is there no one you would care to share it with?"

The man did not answer. He looked at Marie, and vainly endeavoured to fathom her meaning.

"You are my only sentinel," she went on. "What is to prevent our flying together. Once at my château, I will load you with wealth, and you can pass the frontier before our flight has been discovered. I can also put myself beyond the reach of —"

"No more, madame!" replied the archer sternly. "You have mistaken your man. Has not one lesson been enough?"

The conversation was broken by the entrance of the servant of the hôtel — a powerful coarse Flemish woman, with a repulsive manner and countenance, under whose charge Marie was to be placed for the night, a change of guard being posted outside her chamber. She shuddered at this ill-favoured creature, as she followed her to the sleeping apartment, wherein six hours of repose were to be allowed to her before they again started on their journey.

On arriving at Rocroy the next day, she was taken

before M. de Palluan as they had previously arranged, and subjected to a severe examination. But unexpectedly as the interview was brought about, the magistrate could elicit nothing from her; even in the face of a confession in her own hand-writing, which a courier had brought after her from Liège, having found it amongst some more of her effects in her chamber at the convent. She met every question with a firm denial or an evasive answer, given with a readiness and self-possession that astonished her interrogators, who, finding that nothing had been gained by this course, which they imagined would have decided any question of her innocence, however slight, that existed, broke up their court, and made arrangements for proceeding with her at once to the Conciergerie — the chief prison in Paris.*

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAST INTERVIEW.

A LONG and dismal interval followed the arrest of the marchioness before she was brought to trial. The chain of circumstances, connected with the charges every day increasing against her, was so intricate that it required the utmost attention and indefatigable research to connect and arrange its links; and the first legal authorities were engaged, both for the prosecution and the defence. Meanwhile public excitement was raised to the highest pitch. The mysterious circumstances connected with the deaths of M. D'Aubray and his two sons; the station of society in which Marie moved; her reputation for beauty and gallantry, and, more than all, the revelations expected from the *proces* upon the subject of so dark a nature —

* Those who may be inclined to pursue this portion of Marie's career still further, especially as regards the confession, will find much relating to it in the letters of Madame de Sevigny, particularly Nos. 269 and 270.

treating of a crime from the action of which no one felt secure, and about which such terror prevailed, as the mortality by poison hitherto attributed to unknown pathological causes, increased, forming so fearful an episode in the reign of Louise Quartorze; all these things together invested the proceedings with a general interest never equalled. The provost of Paris, the procureur du roi, the lieutenant-criminal of the Chatelet, and other dignitaries arranged a terrible array of facts, fixing the guilt upon the marchioness beyond all doubt; whilst the officials of a lower grade built up fresh accusations every day, by their ingenious connection of circumstances that they arrived at by the strangest methods possible to conceive.

But of all the pleadings connected with this interesting affair, the defence set up by M. Nivelle, the advocate of the marchioness, was most remarkable. Marie had contented herself with simply denying every fact that was brought forward against her; but Nivelle took up the charges in order, one after the other, and endeavoured, with the most consummate skill, to refute the whole of them, even down to the apparently most unimportant. The *liaison* between Marie and Sainte-Croix he allowed — indeed it was generally received; and, in fact, avowed, as the subject had been, it would have been ridiculous to have attempted to deny it. But upon Gaudin he threw all the blame. He endeavoured to show that, being a gambler, Marie's lover had not only thrown away his own property, but a large portion of her's; and being subsequently thrown into the Bastille by M. D'Aubray, had been influenced as much by avarice as by revenge, and had made the unfortunate Marchioness of Brinvilliers his dupe and instrument. He proved that Marie, with her husband, enjoyed a fortune of more than eight hundred thousand livres; that every advantage of position, wealth, and connections had fallen to her lot; and that it was folly to think for one instant, she would have thus far placed herself in the fearful position which she was assumed to have taken when there was nothing to gain, but everything, both in this world and beyond it, to lose. "And, moreover," he added, "the Marchioness of Brinvilliers is per-

suaded that the too common, but fatal mistake of trusting to popular prejudication, can never have any effect upon the minds of judges so eminent for impartiality, nor give rise to any suspicions of the candour of their decision. She knows that they would never condemn upon appearances alone, nor upon common rumour. On the contrary, the more atrocious the crimes were said to be by the popular tongue, judging from the mere form of the accusation, the more care would be required to examine closely all the evidence brought forward, and only to allow those allegations to be received which were consistent with the common course of justice. She hopes, also," he went on, "that the sacred laws of religion are held in too much veneration by her judges, to allow them to give their countenance to any violation of a confession — one of the most important mysteries of our religion: and that since the present accusation brings forward an array of charges — the most frightful and infamous — against a woman of birth and quality, she trusts her judges will not place the least reliance upon the imperfect attestations brought forward, when the clearest and most convincing are necessary to enable them to form a just opinion. She has been deceived by the arts of Sainte-Croix — the only author of all the crimes laid to her charge — and, for the unfortunate connection which placed her in the position to be thus deceived, she has already been sufficiently punished by the misery she has since undergone, and a series of wretched inflictions and trials, which are in themselves sufficient to excite the compassion, not only of those who still think well of her, but of her bitterest enemies."

The original impression of the document is now lying before us; and it is impossible to avoid being struck with the wondrous ingenuity with which the whole paper is drawn up.

But cleverly as M. Nivelle advocated her cause, the collection of facts was too strong to allow her defence to make the favourable impression he desired. The prosecutors, aware of the importance with which the trial was invested by the entire population of Paris, comprising both those who were for and those who were against her, were equally

as keen in their search for condemnatory testimony, as Nivelle had been for any that might exculpate her. Amongst the evidence brought forward was that of her servant Françoise Roussel, who deposed to having been made sick, almost to death, by substances which the marchioness had administered to her in cakes and confections. The archer, Antoine Barbier, related all that had passed upon the road from Liège; Desgrais himself spoke of the papers found in her chamber after she had been carried from that town; and even Glazer's assistant, the miserable Panurge, proved that while Sainte-Croix occupied the rooms in his master's house, the marchioness was in the habit of coming there, and preparing compounds with him, which were afterwards ascertained to be deadly poisons. There could not be the slightest doubt of her guilt.

The behaviour of Marie during this trying ordeal excited the strangest feelings amongst the official dignitaries. Although the most acute and experienced legal men in Paris were engaged upon the side of the crown, they found it impossible to elicit from her anything that tended to prove, from her own actions, that she was guilty, so long as the trial continued; — but when it was brought to a close, and the decision of the chambers was finally given against her, her stubbornness appeared to give way, and the court, with some respect for her rank, then requested the docteur Pirot, of the Sorbonne, to attend constantly upon her. There were always two priests regularly attached to the Conciergerie; but constant communion with the lowest of criminals had made them — so the opinion of the court went — unfit to administer to the marchioness; and the good father, who was esteemed highly in Paris for his gentle piety, was accordingly chosen as her last religious adviser.

He attended at the prison every day, and every day he made an impression upon his charge. He has described her as a woman naturally intrepid, and rising above all difficulties, expressing herself in but few words, yet always to the purpose, and finding, with the most astounding readiness, expedients to free herself from any charges that might be brought against her. She appeared, in any position of difficulty, at once to decide upon what line of argument or

conduct she meant to pursue, even when she was in the most embarrassing situations. Her physiognomy and conversation offered no grounds for supposing that she was any other than a persecuted, gentle, and confiding woman; and her beauty, which had become a proverb, was of that class which appears inseparable from an equally perfect *morale*. True it was, that the harassing trials she had lately undergone had marked her face with a few lines, but "*les yeux bleus, doux et parfaitment beaux, et la peau extraordinairement blanche,*"* still remained; and these attributes, with her other singularly fascinating qualities, were more than enough to enlist many sympathies in her favour.

Day after day did Pirot seek the Conciergerie with the earliest dawn, never leaving his charge but at night; and gradually he found, to his gratification, that her proud spirit was yielding to his unremitting and earnest attention. To him the task was allotted of breaking to her the verdict of the assembled Chambers; and to his gentleness was she indebted for the state of mind that enabled her to receive the terrible tidings with comparative serenity. And so things went on until the eve of the fearful day named by the court for the expiation of her crimes, Marie never feeling at rest but when he was with her; and Pirot taking so deep an interest in his charge, that although his meek disposition and retiring habits almost disqualified him for the task imposed upon him by the Chambers, he resolved never to leave her until the final parting should take place in the Place de Grêve; and as that time drew nigh, the closer did Marie cling to him for consolation and support. She watched the time of his arrival and regretted his departure, as earnestly as she would once have done with less holy motives, when others were concerned, until the period above alluded to drew nigh.

It was, then, the night before the execution. Pirot had business which had taken him from the Conciergerie during the day; but at nightfall he was once more at the prison, for the marchioness had promised to make a full confession of all the events of her life. In the morning, during a

* Pirot.

brief interview of an hour, he had been gratified to find that his unaffected simplicity, his piety, and gentle manners, had in part elicited from Marie a circumstantial avowal of many of the deeds with the commission of which she was charged; and thus far he had accomplished more than her judges had done, or the fear of the torture had led her to confess. As he entered the cell in which she was confined, she arose to receive him with an earnestness that showed how welcome his presence was to her; but started back upon perceiving that the good old man was pale, and evidently shaken.

"You are ill, *mon père*," she said,—"you are so good —so charitable thus to bestow your time on me, that I fear your health is suffering."

"It is not that, madame," he said, as he advanced; "but they have been telling me news in the porter's lodge that has thus affected me. You have heard the sentence?"

"The greffier has told it to me, but not formally," she said. "I am prepared for everything. See — take my hand; is it trembling?"

Pirot seized the small hand presented to him: Marie had power over every muscle to keep it immovable; but her skin was hot and fevered.

"You have heard that they were going to cut this hand off," she said.

"So they have told me," replied Pirot, in a low tone, almost choked with emotion.

"It is," she said, "but an idle story of the people about the prison. On that point you can be calm. And, see,—they are bringing in my supper. You must take some with me; it is the last, you know."

Pirot gazed at her, as he listened to the calm manner in which she spoke, with unfeigned astonishment; and ere he could reply, some of the attendants had brought in a tray, and placed it on the table; whilst Marie almost led the doctor to one of the rude settles, and placed herself opposite to him.

There was something terrible in her unconcern. Her face preserved its usual unfathomable expression; and at times she smiled, but an unwonted brightness sparkled in

her eyes, and she spoke in loud and rapid tones, somewhat resembling a person under the first influence of opium. As she took her place at the table, she did the honours of the homely repast as though she had been at the head of a party in her own house; she even partook of some of the dishes; but Pirot was too much overcome to swallow a morsel.

"You will let me drink to your health," she said; "it is a compliment you need not return." And with her own hands she filled Pirot's glass, continuing as he bowed to her, "To-morrow is a fast-day. I will keep it so, — at least, as much of it as I shall enjoy. And yet I have much to undergo. Then altering her voice, she added, "I would pay you more attention, my father, and serve you myself; but you see they have left me neither knife nor fork."

And in this singular manner did she continue to talk until the meal was over, when she appeared anxious that Pirot should take her confession. He had writing things with him, and at her request produced them, as she said,

"Alas! I have committed so many sins, that I cannot trust to the accuracy of a verbal catalogue. But you shall know all."

This document, for obvious reasons, remained a secret; nor has it since been found. It occupied more than two hours in being drawn up; and just as it was finished the gaoler announced that a female wished to see the marchioness. It was the first request of the kind that had been made since her imprisonment; but she gave orders that the stranger should be admitted; whilst Pirot, remaining at her own request, retired into a corner of the chamber, and occupied himself at prayer. The man of the prison ushered in a woman, with her face carefully concealed. Marie advanced to receive her: when the other threw back her veil, and discovered the features of Louise Gauthier.

The marchioness recoiled a step or two as she recognised the stranger; and her face underwent a rapid and fearful change.

"You have done well," she said in irony, "to let me see you enjoy this last triumph. A sight of me to-morrow,

in the streets, was not enough; you must come to gloat upon me here."

"By your hopes of heaven, speak not thus!" cried Louise earnestly, as she advanced towards her. "You are mistaken. I have come in all good feeling — if you will but receive me."

"What would you do?" asked Marie; "am I to believe you?"

"By all that one who is not utterly lost can call to strengthen her asseverations, you may," replied the Languedocian. "By the memory of him whom we both loved —in the name of Gaudin de Sainte-Croix, do not believe my nature to be so base."

The marchioness gazed at the girl for a minute with a glance of most intense scrutiny. Then she said coldly, once more gaining a command over her temper: —

"Well, mademoiselle, you can continue."

"At this terrible moment," said Louise, in a low impressive accent, "when your life is reckoned in the past, and the future is as nothing on this side of the grave, you will perhaps listen to me, and believe that I have come to you in charity and peace. I forget all that has been; I have thought only that Gaudin loved you—and though— heaven knows — you crushed my heart for ever, in encouraging his attachment, I have come at this fearful hour to seek you, and let you know that there is one of your own sex who, for his sake, will undertake any mission or pilgrimage that will serve you."

Marie made no answer: her pride was struggling with her will, and she could not speak.

"You have seen no female during your dismal imprisonment," said Louise; "let me therefore be your confidant, if there is aught you will stoop to trust me with. Remember, that we shall meet no more. O madame! for your own sake! as you valued Gaudin's love! do not go forth to-morrow in enmity against one who, if she wronged you, did it innocently. What can I do to serve you?"

She uttered the last words with such truthful earnestness, that Marie's pride relaxed, and Pirot at the same

instant rose from his *prie-dieu*, and came towards them. As Louise extended her hand the marchioness took it, and he saw, for the first time since he had been with her, that she was weeping. He led them to one of the prison seats, and in a few minutes Marie was confiding a message to Louise, at his request, for her children.

The interview lasted half an hour; and when it finished the marchioness was perfectly exhausted. She had scarcely force sufficient to tell Pirot that she wished him with her at daylight, when she fell back, unable to keep up any longer, against the damp wall of the prison. The good doctor summoned the females who had attended upon her since her capture, and then, when he saw she was recovering, he took his leave, accompanied by Louise, who left him in the Rue de Calandre to return to her friends at the boat-mill.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WATER QUESTION.—EXILL.—THE PLACE DE GRÊVE.

The early morning of the terrible day arrived. With its first dawn, the good Pirot, according to his promise, was at the gates of the Conciègerie; and being immediately conducted to the cell in which Marie was confined, discovered that she had not been to bed that night, but since the departure of Louise Gauthier had been occupied in writing to various branches of her family.

She rose to receive him as he entered; and at a sign, the person who had been in attendance took her departure. Pirot observed that her eyelids were red with watching, not from tears: but a fire was burning in her eyes with almost unearthly brilliancy. Her cheek was flushed with hectic patches, and her whole frame was trembling with nervous excitement. As the magistrate saluted her with the conventional words of greeting, she smiled, and replied,

"You forget, monsieur, that I shall scarcely witness the noon of to-day. A few hours — only a few hours more! I have often tried to imagine the feelings of those who were condemned; and now, that I am almost upon the scaffold, it appears like some troubled dream."

"We will not waste this brief interval in speculations," replied Pirot. "The officers of the prison will soon interrupt us. Have you nothing to confide to me before they arrive?"

"They will take charge of these letters I have written, and will read them before they send them forth," replied Marie. "But here is one," she continued, as her voice hesitated and fell, "that I could wish you yourself would deliver. It is to M. de Brinvilliers, my husband; it relates only to him, and — my children!"

Pirot looked at her as she spoke: and her voice betrayed the violent emotion that the mention of her children had given rise to. She struggled with her pride for a few seconds, and then broke down into a natural and violent burst of tears. Her sympathies had been scarcely touched whilst merely thinking of her two little daughters; but the instant she named them to another, her wonderful self-possession gave way. She leant upon the rude table, and covering her face with her mantle, wept aloud.

Pirot took the letter from her hand, and read as follows, — thinking it best to allow the violence of Marie's grief to have full play, rather than to attempt to check it by any reasoning of his own:—

"For the last time, Antoine, and on the point of delivering up my soul to God, I write to you, wishing to assure you of my friendship, which will continue until the latest moment of my life. I am about to suffer the degrading punishment my enemies have condemned me to. Forgive them, I beseech you, as I have done: and forgive me also, for the shame which, through my actions, will fall upon your name. Remember that we are but on earth for a short period: and that, before long, you yourself may have to render a just account to God of all your actions, even the most insignificant, as I shall have to do in a few

hours. Instruct and watch over our poor children: Madame Marillac and Madame Cousté will inform you of all they will require. Let your prayers be continually offered up for my repose, and believe that I die thinking of you only. "MARIE."

He had scarcely concluded the epistle when the marchioness recovered from the access of emotion, and raised her face towards him, as she hurriedly wiped her eyes:—

"This is childish," she exclaimed. "What must you think of me, monsieur? And yet I would sooner you should have witnessed this weak ebullition than others in the prison. Come, sir, we will pray for the forgiveness of those under whose directions and hands I am about to suffer, and for the salvation of my own soul."

She threw open the leaves of a religious book that was lying on the bench, and prayed long and earnestly. Pirot joined her: and thus they continued for more than an hour, until their devotions were interrupted by the arrival of the concierge and one or two officers, who came to announce to her that the chief greffier was waiting in the lower room to read the sentence of the court to her. Upon this she arose, without betokening any fresh emotion, and, wrapping her cloak about her, accompanied by Pirot, preceded and followed by the people of the prison, she quitted her cell.

They descended some steps, and led her into a low arched room, but dimly lighted by a few glimmering lamps suspended in iron frames from the ceiling. The walls were damp and rugged; and an old and half-obscure painting of a holy family was suspended at the end of the room. Under this was a common wooden *prie-dieu*, such as we now see in the foreign churches; and near it some rude chairs and a table, on which were materials for writing; and around it three or four of the judicial functionaries were sitting, being now joined by Pirot. Opposite to this, against the wall, was a low pile of what was apparently furniture, covered entirely with a black tarpaulin; and on the ground, near that, some brass and earthen vessels full of

water. The things here enumerated comprised all that was movable in the dungeon.

As Marie entered, one of the magistrates made a sign to the concierge, who placed a seat for her near the table; and when she had taken it the examination commenced. It was conducted by the officials in turn, many questions being suggested by Pirot, and to all of them the marchioness replied with the most extraordinary coolness and self-possession, although with a caution which astounded her interrogators, — avowing the fact of having administered certain drugs to her father and others, but denying all knowledge of their composition or antidotes — and also vehemently declaring that she had no accomplices in the crimes with which she was charged. But beyond this they could extract nothing from her; and although the combined ingenuity of her examiners, deeply versed as they were in every kind of method by which any confession might be educed, was exerted against her during a protracted sitting, she met every question with an exculpatory reply, and nothing more could be obtained from her.*

Seeing this, the examination was at length brought to a conclusion, and one of the interrogators gave orders that the chief greffier should read the arrest. The functionary hereon rose from his seat with the paper in his hand, and commenced reading it in a hurried voice, as if it were a task he was anxious to bring to a speedy conclusion. The "arrest" was to the effect that the court of the chambers assembled having found Marie-Marguerite D'Aubray, the wife of the Marquis of Brinvilliers, guilty of the crimes attributed to her, condemned her to do penance before the

* The author has endeavoured as much as possible in the course of this romance to render it something more than a mere extension of the facts already known respecting the career of the Marchioness of Brinvilliers; and more especially with regard to the admirable narrative of Dumas, in the *Crimes Célèbres*. But, since it would be utterly futile to attempt any description of her last hours more graphic or interesting than the manuscript narrative of M. Pirot, he has, in portions of these chapters, availed himself largely of the circumstances therein stated. Besides this, he has taken the sentence from the original parliamentary documents in his own possession, before alluded to, merely divesting it of long technicalities, and the repetitions of the names of the principal parties concerned in the affair. The authority for matters respecting the "Question" will be found in a note to the *Tableau Moral* of the reign of Louis Quatorze, in Dulaure's History of Paris.

principal door of Notre Dame, with a lighted torch in her hand weighing two pounds; and there, whilst on her knees, to confess that she had wilfully poisoned her father and brothers, and to demand pardon of God. And having been brought hither on a tumbrel, with her feet naked, and a cord about her neck, she should be carried on to the Place de Grêve, to have her head cut off upon a scaffold erected for that purpose; after which her body should be burned, and the ashes scattered to the wind: the question — both ordinary and extraordinary — first being applied. The document went on to speak of the confiscation of her property, which was to go partly to the king, partly to defray the expenses of the prosecutions connected with the affair, including that of Lachaussée: and the residue for masses to be said in the chapel of the Conciergerie, for the repose of the souls of her victims.

During the reading of this paper Marie continued to preserve the same self-possession, even interrogating the greffier with a calm, unshaken voice, upon certain points connected with it. As the functionary concluded the magistrates rose, and another man advanced, of whose presence Marie had not been before aware. He was tall and pale; and he wore a tight shape dress of unrelieved black. Marie perceived by the cords in his hands that he was the executioner; and to him alone she now belonged.

As the magistrates quitted the chamber they drew away the black cloth that covered the apparatus of torture, and revealed the ghastly paraphernalia. Pirot whispered a few words of encouragement in her ear, and then followed the others, leaving Marie alone with the executioner and the greffier, who remained at the table to take down the answers of their prisoner. Marie glanced at the vessels of water which stood upon the ground. She knew the nature of the terrible ordeal she was about to undergo, but her courage failed her not.

"You surely do not mean me to swallow all that water, monsieur?" she said to the greffier; "small as I am, there is more than enough to drown me."

The officer returned no answer, but looked significantly

at the executioner. The man approached the marchioness, and began to unfasten her attire, removing one of her clothes after another, until nothing was left her but an under-garment, in which she now stood before the greffier, her limbs as white as the linen that scarcely shrouded them, but exhibiting not the slightest signs of tremor. Again the interrogator questioned her respecting her accomplices; and again Marie firmly denied the existence of any. All his efforts were vain, as had been those of the magistrates. The sentence was ordered to be carried out.

The "water question," as it was termed, was one of the most revolting punishments which the barbarous usages of the period allowed in its criminal proceedings; the Marchioness of Brinvilliers was nearly one of its last victims, as it was then practised in all its unmitigated severity. The sufferer was compelled to swallow a large quantity of water, forced into the mouth by a horn; the body being at the same time secured to a bench, in a most painful position, whilst the hands and feet were attached to rings of iron in the wall and floor of the chamber. For the "ordinary question," as it was termed, the bench was two feet high, and the quantity of water to be swallowed nearly twelve pints; for the "extraordinary" ordeal a trestle three feet high was substituted for the other, the hands and feet still remaining fixed to the rings, and an additional quantity of water, equal to the first, was forced down the sufferer's throat. In the event of the prisoner's obstinacy, and a refusal to open the mouth, the executioner closed the nostrils with his thumb and finger, until the unfortunate person was obliged to part his lips to breathe, when advantage was immediately taken of this to force the end of the horn down his throat. The consequence of this barbarous practice was the distension of the chest by the introduction of the water, causing such agonising pain that very few were able to resist it.

The executioner approached Marie again; and leading her to the bench, rudely tied her feet to the rings in the floor. Then forcing her back with brutal violence, he fastened her wrists to the links in the wall, pulling the cords

as tightly as they would come. Finally, he fastened the edge of her garment round her knees with one of the bands of her dress; and then announced that all was in readiness for the torture.

The greffier gave the word, and the terrible operation commenced in silence, broken only by an occasional ejaculation of Marie, as measure after measure of the fluid disappeared. But beyond this she spoke not a word: a low wail was her only reply to the questions of the examiner, whilst she shook her head, as much as the hold of her tormentor permitted her to do, in answer to all his energetic and impressive requests that she would disclose all she knew. And in these he was influenced as much by compassion as by the wish that the ends of justice should be answered.

The limits of the ordinary torture had been reached without any admission on her part, and the executioner stopped until he received fresh directions from the greffier to proceed to the second stage of the question. The bench upon which Marie was tied down was removed, and one more than a foot higher was substituted for it, wedged under her by the power of the torturer, without releasing her hands and feet, now so tightly wrung by the cords that the blood started from the parts where they cut into the flesh. Still no cry escaped her lips; with superhuman endurance she went through the continuation of the dreadful ordeal, betraying scarcely any signs of life, except the quivering of her limbs, and an occasional violent contraction of the muscles as she turned herself round upon the trestle as far as the cords would allow of her doing. At last she cried out, with a violence that for the instant startled the officials in attendance, "*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* they have killed me!" And this was followed by a piercing cry of agony; after which all was still.

The greffier rose from his seat, and once more asked her respecting her accomplices. But she returned no answer, nor indeed gave the least sign of consciousness: upon which, fearing that the punishment had been carried too far, he gave orders that she should be unbound. The executioner

obeyed; and then, calling in his fellows to his assistance, they untied the cords from the rings and staples, and bore the unhappy woman into an adjoining chamber, placing her on a mattress before a large fire that was burning in the huge open chimney-place.

It was some time before her senses returned. When she came to herself she found the good Pirot supporting her head; whilst the greffier was communing with the magistrates respecting the proceedings of the ordeal. They quitted the chamber soon after she recovered: and then she was left alone with the docteur, who had thrown his cloak around her thinly-clad and shivering form; and was now only waiting until she should be sufficiently brought round to join him in assisting at the last offices of religion.

At last he half led, half carried her to a *prie-dieu*, and there prayed with her until the cold and dismal light of morning, overcoming the red glare of the fire, stole cheerlessly through the small and heavy-barred loopholes of the chamber. And with it came something of terrible import —the low murmur of the vast crowd already assembled without the gates, and in the Cour des Miracles*,—the audible passing and re-passing of the royal guard, as bodies of them paraded the streets in the immediate line from the Palais de Justice to Notre Dame, and thence to the Place de Grêve,—and an unwonted stir in the Conciergerie, as those friends of the officers and other functionaries, who had procured the *entrée* to the prison, arrived. Not a sound escaped Marie's ear, although Pirot strove in some measure to drown the distant hum by his voice. Every nerve appeared intensely sensitive; and the reaction of a terrible excitement had brought the blood back to the surface of her flesh. Her eyes were again blazing with fevered brilliancy; her cheek was flushed, and a rapid shuddering movement kept every muscle in convulsive action.

Her prayers were only interrupted by the arrival of the

* This *Cour des Miracles*—the principal of those so called—may be recollected by the visitor to Paris at the present day. It adjoins the *bureau* of the prefecture, to which he goes to have his passport *visée* previous to leaving the city. The nuisance of tramping backwards and forwards from the English Embassy to this point is too well known.

same magistrates who had before left her, followed by the executioner and his assistants; and the marchioness directly knew that the terrible hour had arrived. Without a word, she held out her wrists, now discoloured and swollen by the question, to the headsman; and not an expression of pain escaped her lips as he roughly bound them together. The cloak which Pirot had lent her was then thrown on one side, when, as she found her bosom exposed, she requested the man to fasten the lappets of her garment together with a pin. He, however, threw a large scarf over her shoulders, and part of this formed a cowl, which she pulled down over her face as well as her imprisoned hands enabled her to do. And when this had been arranged, she left the chapel preceded and followed by the officers of the prison.

Beyond the wicket some people had assembled in the court. As she emerged from the building, a man pressed rudely forward from the little knot of gazers, and came close to her side, as he thrust a small note almost in her face. Pirot took it from him, at Marie's request, and inquired what it was.

"An account of money due to me," said the man, "for a tumbrel and a horse, both ruined on the road from La Villette to Le Bourget."

"I know not what he means," said Marie.

"You do — you do, madame," answered the intruder. "It was taken from your hôtel in the Rue St. Paul for your flight to Liège."

"Another time will do to settle this," observed Pirot.

"Another time will not do," answered the man. "Where will be my chance of payment five minutes after madame reaches the Grêve?"

As he spoke, the man was pulled forcibly away, and thrust on one side, by one of the bystanders. Marie looked up to see who had thus interfered, and her eyes met those of Philippe Glazer. Clasping his hands together, he gazed at her with a look of intense agony. Even in the horror of the moment Marie perceived that he had placed in his hat the clasp she gave him at Compiègne. She bowed her

head in recognition, and then passed on. Philippe never saw her again.

They moved forward through the courts of the Conciergerie, Pirot never ceasing his religious consolations until they came to the lodge of the prison. Here the *cortège* halted, and then the executioner approached her with a long white garment hanging over his arm. The ghastly *toilette* of the scaffold was to be made at this place. She was about to surrender herself to the operation, when a door at the other side of the lodge was opened, and a large concourse of people — so many that they nearly filled the apartment — entered eagerly. They were chiefly females — women holding high rank in Paris, who had met the marchioness frequently in society. Amongst them were the Comtesse de Soissons and Mademoiselle de Scudery.

The shock given to Marie by this unexpected sight was too great, and she would have fallen but for the support of Pirot. He sustained her whilst the executioner once more released her hands, and drew the long white dress over that she was wearing, tying it up closely round her neck, and knotting a large cord round her waist in lieu of a girdle.

"She has a neat foot," whispered the Countess of Soissons to M. de Roquelaure, as she looked at Marie's small naked foot, not covered by the garment, planted upon the chill pavement of the lodge.

"You told me she squeezed it into a shoe always too small when we saw her at Versailles," replied the other. "O the jealousy of women!"

"You have smarted yourself, monsieur, when she has refused you for a dance," returned the countess; "she did not think you equal to the gay Sainte-Croix."

"And yet he dazzled and went out like a firework," said Roquelaure: "I hope such will not be my fate."

He smiled affectedly as he spoke. Marie heard the import of their heartless conversation, and gazed at them with an expression of withering contempt. They fell back abashed, and retreated amidst the crowd.

"In God's name, monsieur," she said, "offer me some consolation. Is there not something terrible and unnatural in such barbarous curiosity on the part of these people?"

"Madame," replied Pirot, in whose eyes the tears were standing, from pity for the ordeal she was then undergoing, and that which he knew was to come: "regard this curiosity rather as an additional misery imposed upon you as a further expiation, than as a wish on the part of these ill-judging people to cause you further pain. Lean on me, if you need support. I will aid you as far as is in my power, and the law permits."

As he spoke the executioner approached, carrying a heavy lighted torch, which he placed in her hands according to the sentence of the arrest; but her strained and swollen wrists refused to sustain it, and it would have fallen to the ground had not Pirot held it up with his hand, as Marie was leaning heavily upon his arm. The greffier then read the paper a second time, and the dreary procession moved on to the point that required all the nerve of Pirot, no less than of the marchioness, to encounter—the gate of the lodge that opened into the thoroughfare before the Palais de Justice, which was now nearly blocked up, as far as the eye could reach, in every direction, by a vast and expectant crowd.

As the officers of the prison, with their wands, came forth on the top of the flight of steps, the mass of people became suddenly agitated, and their noise increased; but the moment Marie appeared, prominent amidst them all, by reason of her white dress and the torch which she was carrying, a loud and savage roar—a wild continuous cry of ferocious triumph and execration—burst as by one impulse from the entire crowd; and this was caught up by those who were not even visible from the Palais, and echoed along the quays and places adjoining, until the whole of Paris appeared to be speaking with one voice, and rejoicing at the ghastly ceremony about to take place. Marie fell back, as though the uproar had been endowed with material power to strike her; but the expression of her features was not that which Pirot had expected. She was not terrified; on the contrary, the demon appeared to be again reigning in her soul; every line in her face gave indication of the most intense rage: her forehead contracted; her eyes appeared actually scintillating with

passion; her under lip was compressed until her teeth almost bit through it, and she clenched Pirot's arm with a grasp of iron.

"Speak not to me at present, my friend," she said to him, as, noticing her emotion, he addressed to her a few words of intended consolation. "This is terrible!"

She remained for some minutes as if fixed to the ground, gazing at the sea of heads before her, and apparently without the power of moving. Every eye was fixed upon her, for her now fiendish beauty fascinated all who were near her, and no one more than the great painter Lebrun, who was on the steps of the Palais. To the impression made upon him at this fearful moment, and which haunted him long afterwards, we owe the fine painting in the Louvre.

A few minutes elapsed, and then Pirot, obeying the orders of the officers, drew Marie towards the steps, the executioner assisting on the other side. The archers in the street cleared a space with some difficulty, almost riding the people down, who crowded about the entrance to the court; and then they saw more plainly, in the middle of the semicircle thus opened, a small tumbrel with a horse attached to it,—a wretched animal, in as bad condition as the rude dirty vehicle he dragged after him. There was no awning, nor were there any seats; some straw was all for them to travel on. The back-board of the cart taken out, with one end laid on the steps, and the other on the cart now backed against them, made a rude platform, along which Marie hurriedly stepped, and then crouched down in the corner averting her face from the greater part of the crowd. Pirot next entered, and took his place at her side, and then the executioner followed them, replacing the board, upon the edge of which he seated himself; one of his assistants climbed up in front, and the other walked at the head of the horse, to guide the animal along the narrow opening made by the crowd, which the archers with difficulty forced.

Trifling as was the distance, a long space of time was taken up in passing from the Palais de Justice to the Parvis Notre Dame. The Rue de Calandre was blocked up with

people, and it was only by forcing the crowd to part right and left into the Rue aux Fèves, that sufficient room could be gained for the tumbrel to pass; and when it halted, as it did every minute, the more ruffianly of the population, who nested in this vile quarter of the city*, came close up to the vehicle, slipping between the horses of the troops who surrounded it, and launched some brutal remark at Marie, with terrible distinctness and meaning; but she never gave the least mark of having heard them, only keeping her eyes intently fixed upon the crucifix which Pirot held up before her, until the tumbrel crossed the square, and at length stopped before the door of Notre Dame.

Here she was ordered to descend; and as she appeared upon the steps of the gate a fresh cry broke from the multitude, more appalling than any she had before heard, for the area was large, and every available position, even to the very housetops, was occupied. So also were the towers and porticoes of the church, as well as the interior, for all the doors were open, and the sanctity of the place was so far forgotten that those who were in the body of the cathedral joined alike in the ringing maledictions of thousands of voices. But the most overwhelming yell of execration came from the Hôtel Dieu, where the students had, one and all, assembled to insult the unhappy criminal. Their hate was the deeper, for they had known her at the hospital, and had all been deceived by her wondrous hypocrisy; whilst the late revelations at the trial had shown up the destroying hand that, under the guise of charity, administered the poisons to the inmates, and filled the dead-house with the hapless and unoffending victims.

The "*amende*" was the work of a few minutes. The paper, which contained a simple avowal of her crimes, was handed to her by the executioner; and the marchioness read it, firmly and with strange emphasis—albeit the uproar of the people prevented everybody from hearing it, except in close approximation. As soon as it was con-

* The Rue aux Fèves, still in existence, has latterly gained some notoriety from having been the street in which M. Eugene Sue has placed the *tapis franc* of the White Rabbit.

cluded, the torch which she carried was extinguished; the executioners, with Pirot and Marie, remounted the tumbrel, and the cortège once more moved on, towards the fearful Place de Grêve, the crowd making an awful rush after it, as they pushed on, in their anxiety to witness the last scene of the tragedy.

They were approaching the foot of the Pont Notre Dame, when Pirot observed a sudden change in Marie's countenance. Her features, which, notwithstanding all the insults and maledictions of the crowd, had put on an expression almost of resignation, became violently convulsed, and the whole of her attention was in an instant abstracted from the urgent exhortations of her faithful companion. He saw that a violent revulsion of feeling had taken place, and he directly conjured her to tell him the cause of her excitement.

"Do you see that man?" she asked him, in hurried and almost breathless words, pointing along the bridge. "I was in hopes this last trial would have been spared me."

Pirot looked in the direction indicated. A mounted exempt was coming across the bridge, meeting them, as it were, at the head of a body of archers, closely surrounding a small party who were walking. The two escorts with difficulty came nearer to each other, until they met at the foot of the Pont Notre Dame.

"It is a party proceeding from the Hotel de Ville to the Conciergerie with a prisoner," said Pirot. "Heed them not, madame. Remember that a few minutes only are now left to you for prayer in this world."

"I cannot pray," she answered wildly; "it is to that man I owe all this misery. He hunted me to Liège, and, by a mean deception, gave me up into the hands of the officers. It is Desgrais!"

"Turn your eyes from him, madame," said Pirot; "and do not at such a moment give way to this feeling. He acted under authority; and is a trustworthy officer."

"He trapped me like a reptile," replied Marie with bitterness; "and my dying curses ——"

"Madame! madame!" cried Pirot, as Marie raised

herself in the tumbrel, and looked towards the exempt, "do not peril your soul by this ill-timed passion. As you value a chance of salvation, listen to me."

He drew her towards him, and earnestly commenced a prayer, as he endeavoured to turn her attention from the exempt. But she was no longer mistress of her feelings. The sight of Desgrais appeared to have lighted up a fire in her mind: and she continued gazing at him, though without speaking another word, as if impotent rage had deprived her of the power of utterance.

But there was soon a diversion to the feelings of Marie and her companion, as well as to the uproar of the crowd. The escort which Desgrais was conducting had arrived at the side of the tumbrel; and, what with the pressure of the multitude, and the narrow thoroughfare, the vehicle containing the marchioness stopped, to allow the others to pass, who were, as Pirot had observed, conducting a prisoner to the Palais de Justice. Marie had kept her eyes riveted upon the exempt since she first caught sight of him; but suddenly a voice called her by her name in an accent of thrilling familiarity. She looked hurriedly round, and perceived Exili at the side of the tumbrel, surrounded by a party of the Guet Royal.

"Marchioness of Brinvilliers!" he cried, "we have met again; and the rencontre is one of triumph for me. Murderess of Gaudin de Sainte-Croix,—of my son—soul and body—you shall quit this world with my anathema ringing in your ears. *Soyez maudite!*"

"Forward!" cried Desgrais, as he rode by the side of Exili, between him and the cart, touching the marchioness as he passed, who shrunk from him, shuddering with disgust.

The crowd had thronged round the escort so densely that now neither party could move. The delay to Marie was fearful, and the terror of the moment was wrought to its extreme pitch by the curses and horrible salutations of the people, some of whom were close to the tumbrel.

"Ho! ho! the capital meeting!" cried a fellow on the bridge, applauding with his hands for joy. "Two poisoners at a time: Madame de Brinvilliers and the phy-

sician Exili. What a pity they are not going to keep company out of the world."

"Down with the Italian!" shouted another man, who was leaning from one of the windows.

The entire mass of people swayed towards the point where Exili was standing at the last speaker's words, forcing the guards against the houses.

"Down with the Italian!" said the fellow who had first cried out.

"Hang him to Maître Cluet's sign!" said another. "Who knows but he and La Voisin together may bewitch M. de la Reynie, and get clear from the Chambre Ardente."

"Throw him into the river!" shouted a third; "tied neck to neck with Madame la Marquise there."

There was a movement towards the tumbrel. Marie started, and clung to Pirot, as well as her pinioned arms allowed; whilst Desgrais, forcing himself in front of her, presented a heavy snap-haunce at the ruffian who had just spoken.

"Down with the exempt!" cried several voices. "He would murder the people."

"Let him be!" exclaimed the man at the window. "He is only keeping her to make better sport on the Place de Grêve. Settle the Italian, if you please."

There was a fresh rush, against which the guards could make no opposition, fixed as their arms were to their sides by the pressure of the mob; and this was increased by the plunging of some of the horses on which the archers were mounted, causing additional confusion and crushing. Determined to say a few words to the rabble, Exili contrived to get upon a round block of stone at the base of one of the houses, placed, in common with many others, to afford a protection to foot-passengers from the wheels of vehicles. But he had scarcely mounted, even before his guards were aware of his intention, when one of the mob hurled a wooden sabot with great force at his head. It struck him in the face, and he was in an instant covered with blood. Stunned by the blow, he fell forwards, and the multitude, excited like brutes at the sight of gore, rushed on through the ring which the Guet Royal in vain endeavoured to form, and

seized him. A furious contest now commenced between the people and the archers; but the disparity of numbers was too great for them. They were borne down by the mere pressure of the mass, the ringleaders of whom hurried Exili, almost insensible, — his limbs torn and bleeding from their rough handling, in addition to the blow he had received, — towards the parapet of the bridge.

"Into the river! into the river!" cried a hundred voices. "Away with the poisoner! Death to the sorcerer!"

"He can swim like a fish," said the fellow at the window. "I recollect him long ago, when they took him at the boat-mill."

"This shall stop him from doing so again!" shouted a ruffian. "I will take the law out of M. de la Reynie's hands. My brother in the Guet Royal was poisoned that nighti Now see if he will swim."

As he spoke he raised a butcher's bill above the crowd, and it descended upon the head of the miserable Italian, crushing his skull before it. An awful yell of triumph broke from the crowd as the body was raised high above them by a dozen swart arms, and hurled with savage force over the bridge into the chafing river below. Thus terribly died the physician.

During this bloody and rapid scene Desgrais took advantage of the rush made by the mob in another direction to ride before the tumbrel, clearing the way as he best could for the *cortège* of the marchioness to proceed, expecting that she would next fall a victim to the fury of the populace. Directly they got from the bridge to the quay adjoining the Port au Foin, he found the way cleared by the troops, who lined the footway on either side, and had been on duty since the early morning. But the crowd was still very great outside the line; and their cries never ceased, albeit Marie paid no attention to them now that the danger which had a minute before threatened her was averted: but never moved her eyes from the crucifix, which Pirot had held before her throughout the scene, until the procession turned from the Port to the Place de Grêve.

The sight here presented was sufficient at once to draw Marie's attention from the exhortations of her companion. The entire Place was filled with spectators, the troops keeping but a little space clear immediately around the scaffold, which rose in the centre some ten feet from the ground. Far along the quay and the streets leading from the Grêve did the sea of heads extend. All the housetops were crowded with gazers, swarming like bees upon the parapets and chimneys, and on the ledges over the shops; and every window-place in the Hôtel de Ville had its dozen occupants.

Pirot had expected a terrible outburst of malediction when the *cortège* arrived here, and feared also that the courage of the marchioness would entirely fail her upon getting the first sight of the scaffold. But on both points he was mistaken. As the tumbrel advanced, after the first murmur of recognition, a dead silence reigned; amidst this vast mass of many thousands not a sound was audible but the bell of the Tour d'Horloge, which kept tolling hoarsely at protracted intervals. Marie herself betrayed but little emotion. A rapid shiver passed over her frame as she first saw the preparations for her execution: and then she bent her eyes upon Pirot, and so kept them stedfastly until the assistant headsman guided the horse to the foot of the scaffold.

At this fearful moment M. Drouet approached the tumbrel, and taking off his hat, with a show of courtesy, that appeared a mockery at such a moment, said,

"Madame, I have orders to inform you that if you have any further declarations to make, the magistrates are ready to receive them at the Hôtel de Ville."

"Monsieur," replied the marchioness, "how much oftener am I to tell you that you know all. For pity's sake do not further persecute me. I have confessed everything."

Drouet turned his horse away, and rode up to the scaffold to exchange a few words with some of the officials who were standing near it. At the same moment the executioner descended from the cart, and with his man went up the steps of the scaffold.

"Do you leave me?" gasped Marie hurriedly, as she seized Pirot's hand. "Be with me on the scaffold, even when —. He is coming. It will soon be over."

"I will not leave you," said Pirot, rising, "until you are no more."

"Stop!" cried Marie. "One word more. I may not speak to you again. Let me tell you how deeply I feel your patient kindness throughout this fearful trial. They are ready—keep by my side: and when we are on the scaffold, at the moment of my death, say a *De Profundis*. You promise this."

Pirot bent his head and squeezed her hand, in token of compliance. He tried to speak, but his voice failed him. His whole frame appeared convulsed, and he offered a strange contrast to the strange calm of his companion.

The executioner came down from the scaffold, and assisted the marchioness to descend, whilst Pirot also got out, and she went with him up the ladder — hurriedly, as though she was anxious to bring the scene to a conclusion. As she reached the platform, her beauty evidently made an impression on the crowd. They turned one to the other, and murmured; but this soon died away into the same deep, awful silence — so perfect, that the voices of the executioner and Pirot could be plainly heard. Throwing herself upon her knees, Marie submitted to the second dreary toilet she had been obliged to undergo. The assistant cut off the whole of her beautiful hair, throwing the long ringlets carelessly about on the scaffold; and next, tearing down the collar of her dress, rudely turned it back, so as to leave bare her neck and shoulders. Then bandaging her eyes with a small scarf, he retired.

The sun was shining brightly; and at this moment its rays fell upon the glittering blade of a long sword which the headsman had hitherto kept concealed under his garment. Pirot saw it, and his heart sunk within him — so much so, that his utterance was choked, and Marie, by whose side he was kneeling, demanded why he had thus finished his prayer. And then, as if aware of the cause, she exclaimed rapidly,

"Holy Virgin, pray for me, and forgive me! I aban-

don my body, which is but dust, to the earth. Do thou receive my soul!"

The executioner drew near, and the good Pirot closed his eyes, as with the greatest difficulty, in broken and quivering words, he commenced the *De Profundis*. But in a few seconds his voice was again checked by the noise of a dull heavy blow at his side, and a strange and sudden sound from the crowd — not a cry of alarm, or triumph, but a rapid expiration of the breath, almost like a hiccough, terribly audible. The next instant a hand was laid on his shoulder. He started, and looking round with an effort, perceived the headsman standing over him.

"It was well done, monsieur," said the man; "and I hope madame has left me a trifle, for I deserve it."

Almost mechanically following the direction of the man's finger as he pointed to the platform, Pirot's eyes fell upon a ghastly head lying in a pool of blood. He saw no more; but fell insensible on the scaffold.

This was scarcely noticed in the terrible excitement of the minute. The executioner calmly took a bottle from his pocket, and refreshed himself with its contents; and at the same time a cloud of smoke rose from the back of the scaffold, which was the part furthest from the river. He raised the head, and, pulling the gory scarf away, showed it to the people; then taking up the body as he would have done a sack, he threw them both down upon the pile of faggots which his assistant had just lighted. The wood was dry, and the flames were further fed by resinous matter sprinkled amongst them; and in twenty minutes some charred ashes alone remained, which the crowd nearest the scaffold struggled violently to collect, as the Garde kicked and dispersed them as well as they were able about the Place de Grêve.

And in this manner terminated the dark career of the Marchioness of Brinvilliers.

CHAPTER XXXIX. AND LAST.

LOUISE GAUTHIER. — THE CONCLUSION.

It frequently occurs that after a day of stormy darkness — when the elements appear to have combined the whole of their power against the earth, splitting the tossed and dismantled branches of the trees from their parent trunk, beating down the produce of the fields, and deluging the valleys with a sudden and rapid inundation, whilst the fire-laden clouds obscure the sun, lighting up the heavens in his stead by lurid flashes — the wind subsides, the clouds disperse, and the calm sunset beams over the now tranquil landscape.

True it is, the vestiges of the mischief wrought remain; but their importance is diminished by the general quietude that reigns around. The foliage is fresh and green; the cleared air is breathed gratefully, and imparts its lightness to the spirits; feeding hope, and kindness, and all good aspirations. The odours of the flowers are more fragrant, and the colours of their petals brighter; and the torrent which rushed darkly in its overcharged course, reflecting only the glooming heavens above, now once more murmurs over its bed of bright pebbles, sparkling in the warm rays of eventide.

Our scene changes, and now for the last time, from the fearful Place de Grêve to the most charming district of the teeming and sunny Languedoc. It is noon; and the stillness of a summer mid-day reigns around. But everything is not hushed. Birds are singing, and the hum of bees blends pleasantly with their minstrelsy, coming in soft murmurs from the floating aviaries lying upon the surface of a glassy river, which would seem at perfect rest but for the quivering of the buds and lilies that struggle with its gentle stream, or the hanging flowers that droop from the

bank to kiss up the clear water. The sky is deep-blue, and cloudless; and the summer foliage of the trees waves in pleasant relief against its light, causing the dancing shadows to quiver on the spangled turf below, as though even the sunbeams were sporting for very gladness.

And now and then sounds of laughter, and snatches of old Provençal melodies are heard near a cottage which forms part of a small homestead on the banks of the river. On a table at the door, and beneath the shadow of a huge chesnut-tree—of which many more are visible on the land,—is spread a repast of honey, bread, cheese, and wine; and seated at this table we have little difficulty in recognising Benoit, Bathilde, and Louise Gauthier. The two first were plump and merry as ever — perhaps more so: and Louise appears to have lost some of her sadness. Her cheek is scarcely so pale as it was in Paris when Benoit first knew her, and now and then a faint smile may be detected on her lips, which it appears to be Benoit's ceaseless endeavour to call up.

"Ah!" exclaimed the honest ex-keeper of the boat-mill, with the expression of one whose stomach is comfortably filled; "this is better than the great cities, after all. To think after staying in Paris so long we should come back with less than we went."

"You forget Louise," replies Bathilde, as she takes their friend kindly by the hand.

"Not at all," continues Benoit, as he rises and kisses the Languedocian with a smack that quite echoes again. "There, *ma femme*, you may be jealous of that if you like, and I don't care; nor more does Louise, as I would wager my life. Eh! Louise?"

"You would find it a difficult task to offend me," replies Louise, "for I owe you too much kindness,—even if you kiss me before Bathilde."

"You owe us nothing. I think the debt is on our side. Whose are these things? Whose is this bit of ground? —yours, all yours! and you shall turn us out when you like."

"I do not think I shall do that," is Louise's answer;